

Vicar's Report, APCM 24th April, 2022

This time last year we had just re-started public worship after shutting for most of Jan to March. At that stage we were worshipping at 9am, combining our usual morning services into one. What a joy it is therefore, a year on, to be able to worship at both 8am and 10am! And we have felt able to make mask-wearing entirely optional now in our services and are in the process of reinstating coffees after church. While we recognise the pandemic is by no means over, it is so good to take steps towards normal fellowship and community after so many months of distance and relative isolation.

Having established online worship we decided to continue that, enabling anyone who can't get to church to still connect with us, as well as providing a 'shop window' for any enquirers. The Presence evening service is enabling people to meet with God in creative and inspirational ways and the church has continued to remain open for private prayer 2-3pm on a Wednesday afternoon. Housegroups are meeting face to face, and our toddler and Refresh café community outreach projects are back in action and are much appreciated.

An innovation from last year was to change our usual summer holiday club to a one-day a week model of 'Fun and Food'. This ran through the summer and provided meals as well as a supportive family play environment (see Youth and Children's report). I would encourage people to get involved with this work and the youth and children's work more generally, as it has a great impact on the lives of young people.

We have also been providing Aldi vouchers to families under pressure. In these ways we have sought to respond to the environment of economic challenge that is facing society. Through our links to New Avenues (an initiative of the Dartford Churches) we have further supported people facing homelessness and food poverty.

In terms of more general pastoral support we have been pleased to continue the buddy system. While this was introduced to meet a need during social distancing and lockdown, the value of having a network of contacts and people looking out for one another has proved its worth and I'm really grateful to all those making its continuation possible. Beyond that there is a need to grow the team of people engaged in visiting so that we can follow up the needs that become apparent through the buddy system.

The PCC has explored priorities moving forward from the pandemic and the top three are relationships, finance and facilities.

We are actively looking at ways to build relationships in church. The quiz night, back in February, was a good example of this and other events are being planned. Communications are an important part of building community and I'm pleased that the parish magazine was re-launched in March. It now has a quarterly format and is aiming to be more visual in its presentation. Reviewing the website and making greater use of social media are other aspects of communication that are being developed.

Church finances are under a lot of pressure (see Treasurer's report) and so we will be using the magazine and as well as sermons to educate the church as to the how the church's finances work and the nature of Christian generosity. Part of this is to show

how much is achieved through money we receive. We are planning, in the autumn, to give people a chance to respond by reviewing their giving in the light of this.

Facilities are on the agenda but in a more modest way than in previous reviews. The value of flexibility in layout has been seen through the pandemic (e.g. holding housegroups in the chapel or at the back of church). The temporary faculty that enabled the back of church to be used in that way will run out and so low-cost options for retaining that flexibility and also making more space at the front (e.g. for the Refresh café and the Presence service) are being explored with the Diocese. In addition, there is still a need to redecorate and there are ongoing maintenance issues, so we will have to deal with these matters in a phased manner, a step at a time.

Last summer we said goodbye to our curate Laura and her family. Looking ahead we are pleased to be welcoming a new curate this summer. Alex Coakley-Young and his wife Emma and son Teddy. They will be arriving mid-August ready for his ordination as deacon on 3rd September.

I thank everyone for the sacrifice and team work that enables Christ Church to flourish and shine as a light in the community. It was a joy to welcome Bishop Simon earlier this month and to receive anointing for people's every day faith and witness, and it served as a reminder of how far and wide Christ's love is spread through his church. Similarly, the Following Christ course, with 8 people exploring Christian faith and commitment has deepened the faith of those involved. More generally we are seeing new people join Christ Church and settle down and make it 'their church'. That is a huge privilege and responsibility for us, and I do pray we can develop relationships and nurture everyone who becomes part of our community.

So we give thanks to God. In these demanding and challenging times there are many signs of his working among us. But we do need wisdom, perseverance and generosity to lay hold of all that he has for us, and I pray that in the coming year we will know his grace to rise to these challenges and opportunities.

God bless,
Richard