

## Parish of Tettenhall Wood: Incumbent's Report for APCM Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020

*This report is to be read in conjunction with the Interim Report written for the original APCM date due to be held on Sunday 26 April 2020.*

A radio interview I heard recently told the inspirational story of a young and athletic woman (whose name I didn't catch), who had suffered a catastrophic accident leaving her wheelchair bound. It felt like the end of everything for her. However, through extraordinary strength of character, resilience and hope, she has rebuilt her life; and is on the verge of making the GB basketball team for the Tokyo para-Olympics. Through support of family and friends, helpful technological aids, and a willingness to re-learn everything from scratch, she refused to accept the label of disabled, and proved it's no euphemism to speak of being *differently-abled*.

I take inspiration from her story as we reflect on the church's journey over recent months. In March, the church, like everything else, was shut down at a stroke. In just one moment, all the plans and projects we were working on, as well as the regular week by week services and events, were brought to a shuddering halt. Re-building church life – a process begun but far from complete – has been a matter of re-learning everything from scratch, working out what can be done safely and in line with ever changing rules. My hope and prayer is that we re-emerge a differently-abled church.

This process has already begun:

- We are becoming differently-abled in COMMUNICATION: we had never thought before of sending a weekly mailing to all church members. Now, no one need miss out because they miss a week at church. Alongside this, the website has grown hugely in importance as a central hub of information and a platform for giving.
- We are differently-abled in PASTORAL CARE: Phone networks may not be the same as face-to-face, and we miss our groups and gatherings, but they have enabled pastoral support to be given more frequently and more universally than ever before, and in many cases have blurred the line between care-giver and care-receiver as each supports the other.
- We are differently-abled in our TEAM WORKING – the body of Christ going on-line! Many of us may hate Zoom meetings, but they can enable wider participation. Another sort of team-work has enabled us to re-open the church buildings for worshippers. Enormous thanks to the Wardens and others who have done the hard graft of risk-assessment and Covid-security.
- Most obviously of all, we are differently-abled in WORSHIP: Hybrid services, those that can be accessed both in church and at home, have become the norm and are set to stay. It's not what I had in mind when I spoke of the renewal of worship, but it will have long-term impact. It's been a steep technological learning curve. Thank you to those you've led us upwards, with recorded and blended services, website, Facebook and much else – specifically, Russell, David, Ben, Steph, Richard – and to the preaching team, singers and those reading and leading intercessions, for being willing to embrace the new. I appeal to anyone who may have the skills, or be willing to learn, to come and get involved. Looking to the longer term, we need to shift from pre-recording a separate service to filming our worship in church. That's why I think, even in these most testing times financially, that to continue with the AV projects already in place, is crucial for the future.

I am very conscious when you're learning new things, glitches happen, and not everything works as well as you hope. I am also conscious of the enormous challenges we face – ones of finance, of falling numbers, of participation, of the digital divide, as well as the tide of new restrictions coming in. But equally, we must hold to the sort of inspiration I began with – that life can be rebuilt, that through mutual support, through technological opportunity, through willingness to relearn how to do things, and above all, through faith, hope and love, we can emerge a differently-abled church still sure of our shared mission in God's world.