

INCUMBENT'S REPORT TO THE 2022 APCM

Sunday services have taken place in church every week since the last APCM. In normal times, that would be unremarkable, but since March 2020, we've learned to take nothing for granted. Over the last twelve months we have gradually restored much of what was previously 'normal' to our worship – most recently at Easter, the wine for Communion and standing to sing. Each time we've move forward, our worship has felt re-energised. The 8 o'clock and Thursday morning Communions at Christ Church have been restored, and Friday evening prayer introduced.

A year ago, the new camera, projection and streaming equipment had just been installed at Christ Church. The project was completed with improved lighting around the nave altar, and a new AV cabinet. Live-streaming and recording of main services have become the norm. With this, and the recorded midweek reflection online, and the weekly distribution of sermons and intercessions with the notice sheets, our total worship offering is now greater than in pre-pandemic times.

All this has involved a huge amount of work, creativity and commitment from many people. Each change in the use of buildings has required careful risk-assessment, and I want to thank the wardens for their work on this and a whole range of other behind-the-scenes tasks. With digital platforms now the norm for Sunday worship, it takes a considerable commitment to prepare Powerpoint presentations each week, as well as to operate the equipment on Sundays: my thanks go to all involved.

Ministry: thanks once again to our preaching ministry team – Carol, Lin, Joy, Jane, Caroline and Richard, for sharing their gifts and insights. Richard Shreeve has decided not to renew his licence as a Reader after this year. I want to take this opportunity formally to thank him: his preaching has always been an example of paying close attention to the Biblical text, alongside which he has inspired us, especially with his personal experiences overseas.

Discipleship: Thanks to April Beech for her enthusiasm, through the autumn and spring terms we showed 'The Chosen,' the new inspirational multi-episode life of Christ, making use of our new technology at Christ Church. Another important part of discipleship is how as Christians we respond to social change. Our Lent course *Living in Love and Faith* helped participants think through important issues relating to identity, sexuality, marriage and relationships.

Pastoral care has remained challenging but vital through times of isolation. My thanks to all who have held the bonds of community together through so many phone calls, especially thinking of Jane and Chris at Good Shepherd, and all who have been part of Veronica's network at Christ Church. As time has gone on, calls have been more targeted at those who most need them, but it's good to hear some of the friendships established through lockdown have continued beyond.

Veronica has indicated to me that she wishes to reduce her role as pastoral co-ordinator, so I take this chance to thank her for the monumental work she has done over many years. We now have to explore the right way forward both for her and for the church.

Most activities in our halls have restarted: as well as the outside hall-hirers, Place of Welcome, Dementia Carers Support Group, Mothers' Union, Christ Church Fellowship and Little Angels have fulfilled some of the pent-up demand for interaction. Children's work has been slower. While Junior Church has resumed each week at Christ Church, but fewer families have come to church. *Easter Cracked* on Good Friday showed interest has not gone away.

Opportunities to go into schools have also been slow to resume, but the *Open the Book* team has returned to Christ Church Infants' over the last term, and both Infants' and Juniors' had their Easter services in church once more.

Financially, whilst Good Shepherd accounts balanced, at Christ Church we have had to rely on reserves to pay our way (but then, the last two years can realistically be classified as the 'rainy days' for which we keep something in reserve). Fund-raising has been very difficult, and for long periods, hall-hire was not possible. However, the hirers are back (and at Good Shepherd, increased in number) and social/fundraising restarted with a highly successful joint Christmas fair. Most important of all, the overall giving to the church has not gone down, and we are all immensely grateful to one another – to all who give generously and even sacrificially, so the church's ministry may be sustained. So, thank you.

Overall, we have pulled through the last two years, under God's grace, by pulling together, using the contributions of so many different people.

Collaboration between our two churches has continued to develop, so that it has come to matter less which church they belong to, than what each can offer to the whole. At the wider deanery and diocesan levels, the *Shaping for Mission* process has taken place. The background is the challenge of resourcing ministry in straightened times, but I should be clear no one has suggested any reduced allocation in this parish. But collaboration is very much the shape of things to come.