

St Bartholomew's Church Yarnton



Annual Parish Report 2021

Aims and purposes

St Bartholomew's, Yarnton Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent, the Reverend Oliver Petter, in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

Introduction

2021 continued to be greatly affected by the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic. We began the year by going into another lockdown, and deciding to suspend public worship. Resuming in mid March, it was not until mid July that congregational singing was permitted, after a 16 month gap. There was a period thereafter where restrictions were less significant. However as we moved into the winter, the omicron wave sadly arrived just as we were entering the most joyful period of the the Advent and Christmas season.

The pandemic continued to affect all aspects of our parish ministry, and the challenge was to sustain what was possible, within the restrictions of each period. Within our church community there were members who were greatly affected by health challenges, and by bereavement. There were members for whom the cumulative effect of the pandemic was the cause of great fatigue. The wider picture of the local church was that volunteer resources were stretched in a way unseen since the second world war. It was a year of challenge.

Thank you to all who have continued to support St Bartholomew's. We are so grateful to all those whose hard work and commitment enabled us to sustain the church's ministry in new as well as familiar ways, and to maintain our central offering of worship and prayer, and pastoral care in our community. We are blessed by all our congregation and friends. Particular thanks must go to our excellent and dedicated PCC led by our churchwardens Paul Tweddle and John Appleton, Treasurer Gary Brewerton and Secretary Penny Small, and Safeguarding Officer Charlotte Rayner.

We can only strive to be faithful in that which God asks of us during times of unknown challenge and trust that that in keeping our eyes fixed on the Lord and

walking with him on the faultline of the Cross, he will walk with us into the future that is revealed in the light of His Resurrection. 2021 gave us cause for thanksgiving, with a loyal core of regular worshippers gathering to pray week by week, and with a sense of gathering momentum as we began a new church year in December.

Objectives and activities

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship at our church and to become part of our parish community at St Bartholomew's. The PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the parish. The Parish profile published previously in April 2018 reflected an awareness of the "the need to contact and involve new residents of the parish." This has remained a priority in the current Rector's ministry thus far. We face the challenge of being physically located on the edge of the village which we serve, so there is little visibility of the church for village residents.

St Bartholomew's is the only physical Christian presence in our parishes and we welcome all denominations to join our worship. Our tradition is simple, traditional worship, although we are open to change. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament. We try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the Gospel; and developing their knowledge and trust in Jesus.
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Missionary and outreach work.

Much of what we aspire to offer was limited by restrictions for much of 2021, whilst the core offering of public worship, and pastoral care continued within the limitations, both in person and remotely/online.

The PCC has expressed a commitment to the Diocesan Vision, of which four points continue to have great resonance.

- To make a bigger difference in the world and serve the poor.
- To share our faith with adults, children and young people and grow the church in every

place; rural, urban and suburban.

- To serve every school in our community.
- To put the discipleship of all at the heart of our common life and set God's people free.

To facilitate this work it is important that we maintain the fabric of St Bartholomew's church.

PCC members in 2021 were: : Rev. Oliver Petter-Incumbent, John Appleton-Churchwarden, Paul Tweddle-Churchwarden, Gary Brewerton-Treasurer, Marion Jones(until the APCM), Charlotte Rayner-Safeguarding officer, Ian Gill(until the APCM) , Douglas Fairhurst, Neil Small, Penny Small-PCC Secretary and Deanery Synod representative. At the APCM Rachel Woods, Rosie Hilliard and Jill Rowbotham were elected onto the PCC.

Achievements and performance

January- March - lockdown

As we began 2021, the principal pattern of worship continued to be the 8am Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer) and Parish Eucharist at 11am on Sundays. Alongside this we continued to hold a Wednesday morning 9.30am Holy Communion Service.

However, due to high number of covid infection around Christmas 2020 and into the start of January, our Benefice took the decision to pause public worship. This was a painful decision in the midst of a situation that was highly uncertain and where the word case scenarios projected were concerning.

Worship moved exclusively online once more, being offered initially from the Vicarage. Public worship resumed for Mothering Sunday on 14th March.

March 14th onwards

Public worship restarted. Initially our worship in church was without congregational singing, and supported by a single cantor. Face coverings and 2m distancing continued.

Lent, Holy Week and Easter

We ran a Benefice online Study Group in Lent, exploring the Creed. During Lent public worship restarted for the fourth Sunday in Lent, Mothering Sunday. As we moved into Palm Sunday and Holy Week we were limited to a sole cantor singing, with the possibility of congregational singing outside. We thus ended services with a hymn in the churchyard. Maundy Thursday was movingly observed by a small congregation, and foot washing was prohibited due to covid restrictions. On Good Friday we held our service in the churchyard and a good congregation on a rather cold day. Our Easter Vigil returned after a year of being 'online' in 2020. It was very special to gather at dawn and celebrate Christ's Resurrection. We were glad to be joined by our new bishop Gavin Collins and Christina his wife. For our 11am Easter morning service we decided to move into the sunny churchyard and all were able to join in with the hymns. Easter Sunday proved to be a day of great joy.

HRH Prince Philip On Sunday 11th April a Service in the period of public mourning for HRH Prince Philip took place on what was low Sunday.

Congregational singing and fellowship returning

Congregational singing was permitted again from July 19th – after a gap of 16 months.

We had been permitted to resume post service fellowship weeks before, and the chance to share a cup of coffee together. It was striking to reflect on the significance of the restrictions over that long period.

Our response to God in sung praise, and our encounter with Christ in one another in fellowship is integral to the life of faith and discipleship for most Christians and it was painful to be without these realities for so long.

The reintroduction of fellowship and coffee reminded us of how integral a part of our regular Christian gathering this is, and of how worship, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, finds a particular fulfilment in the ensuing fellowship.

Climate Sunday We held a Climate Sunday service for our main 11am Parish Communion on 18th July. This was an open air service in the churchyard, accompanied by Yarnton band, on a very warm summer's day. This was part of the initiative that was developing with our emerging 'eco church' group.

St Bartholomew's Day

We celebrated St Bartholomew's Day on 24th August with an open air service of the word in the churchyard, accompanied by Yarnton Band. This was followed by a fish and chip supper, also in the churchyard. This was the first major social gathering since Christmas 2019 and was a wonderful occasion. We were grateful to Yarnton band for their great contribution to the evening.

Remembrance Sunday: On Remembrance Sunday we held an Act of Remembrance and Parish Communion at the earlier time of 9.30am in St Bartholomew's prior to an Act of Remembrance at the Yarnton War Memorial on Rutten Lane at 11am, led by the Rector. This was supported by a large number from the uniformed organisations, and with music from Yarnton Band training band. There was a large congregation gathered and the 'format' was felt to have worked well in enabling so many to gather.

The traditional afternoon service and parade did not take place due to concerns over large numbers in church.

Advent and Christmas.

We held a range of events and services to celebrate Christmas, hoping to reach out to as much of the community as possible after the heavy restrictions of 2020.

Among these were:

- Advent Café Create in the church
- Christingle Service with Yarnton Band
- Village Carol Service
- Crib Service
- Midnight Mass and Christmas morning services

In 2021 we offered an additional Christingle Service, with Yarnton Band playing and thereby supporting three services for us in the season. The regulars who gathered felt that this service some very special moments, and in particular the lighting of the Christingles. The weekend in question was just after the omicron scare blew up and decreased attendance considerably.

Village Carols and Crib Service

These traditional highlights of our Christmas celebration took place in spite of the omicron outbreak. We were extremely grateful to Charlotte Rayner for helping to co-ordinate and intricate seating plan. Whilst numbers were limited and a reservation system operated, demand was high and we were at our 'capacity' for both services. The context of the pandemic meant that these services had a different atmosphere. The raw reality of the Christmas story was cast in a different light for many.

Occasional Offices – Weddings, Baptisms, Funerals

Weddings

Three Weddings took place in St Bartholomew's –the wedding of Benjamin Pollard and Clara Blackings on 9th July, and the wedding of Max Godfrey and Laura Harle on 20th November. The number was lower than usual, due to the pandemic.

Baptisms

We held four baptisms in 2021. The number was low due to the pandemic.

Funerals

There were 9 Funerals of Parishioners over 2021.

In addition, there was one Service of Thanksgiving followed by the Interment of ashes.

Parish Life

Electoral Roll

In 2021 we revised our electoral roll. The total number of people on it was 50, as it had been in 2020.

Deanery Synod

Penny Small was elected as Deanery Synod representative at the APCM in 2019 and remained in post through 2021. The Synod provides the PCC with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the church.

Safeguarding

The PCC adopted the new Safeguarding Policy in January. Members of the PCC completed online safeguarding training as required by the Diocese. Thank you to Charlotte Rayner for her work as Safeguarding Officer.

Ministry

The Vicar continued to be supported by Rev'd Jim Turner and Canon Barbara Doubtfire in leading worship. We were grateful for regular cover from Rev'd James Finnemore and Canon Charles Chadwick.

We are grateful to our regular intercessors and readers for their contribution to our worshipping life, and to our welcomers. Thank you to Charlotte Rayner for co-ordinating the rota of volunteers.

Jonathan Roberts continued in his two year placement in the Benefice, running from the academic years 2020-1 and 2021-2. He was a regular participant in worship at St Bartholomew's assisting in many roles. He also assisted Oliver with pastoral visiting in the parish.

Music

We were once again grateful to Malcolm Hawkins for playing for us throughout the year, and at each stage of restrictions, playing either in the church, or from home via online platforms.

Benefice administration

The PCC resolved to work towards employing a part time Benefice Administrator to support the Rector.

Pastoral Care

Prior to the pandemic, Reverend Oliver Petter and Reverend Jim Turner visited all church members who requested it, to celebrate communion with them either at their homes or in hospital. They visited The Sanctuary care home regularly, and there were also ad hoc pastoral visits to Erdington house. This range of visiting continued to be paused in 2021, with visits to Erdington House resuming by request in December.

During the periods or peak restrictions, visiting was limited to more urgent scenarios. As the year progressed and restrictions eased, a fuller range of visiting became possible once more.

Thanks are due to Jim Turner for his dedicated pastoral ministry and telephone ministry. We are grateful to the ways in which members of our community care for one another and support in pastoral and practical ways.

Little Sheep Charlotte Rayner resumed the weekly term time gathering in the summer. This began outdoors in the churchyard, and moved indoors in the autumn, with several new families becoming regular participants. Little Sheep is much appreciated by many families. Craft activities, songs, games are offered, as well as short time of prayer. We are extremely grateful to Charlotte for all the time and care she brings to this ministry.

Mission and Evangelism

Caring for God's creation

During 2020 PCC discussions led to a desire to take more decisive action to play our part in caring for creation. A series of discussions were planned and a group met at the Rectory in June and July over 4 weeks to reflect on our response to the climate crisis, and discern how as the local church we could act. We planned two events: a Climate Sunday service, and nature count as part of the "Churches

Count on Nature” national initiative. We also undertook to participate in the Eco Church initiative and began work towards the Eco Church Bronze award. An Eco Church action group emerged from this discussion series. The work on caring for creation was backed by a clear sense of discernment that this was a priority and gave something to build on moving forward.

Reflective Morning

In September a group from our congregation gathered with Canon Charles Chadwick to reflect on the life and mission of St Bartholomew’s, and the questions of how we live our the command to love God and to love our neighbour. The PCC continued to review these reflections.

Café Create Café Create had developed during 2019 in Yarnton Village Hall. This was offered as an all-age event, offering craft activities and reflections to explore Christianity, with a café style setting.

After a gap of 22 months, we resumed Café Create in October 2021, and had our highest ever attendance. This was followed up by a session in November. Through this outreach we encountered some teenagers who presented challenging behaviour. As a result we suspended the outreach, and moved the gathering into the church for an interim.

The aim of reaching out in the heart of our village, and offering hospitality and a gentle introduction to Christian fellowship and spirituality remained a priority.

Study Group

We resumed our study group with a Benefice online Lent group, exploring the Creed. The series used 6 short videos from our Bishop Steven Croft, and material written by Oliver. The series raised some profound questions and generated good conversation.

In the autumn we held a study group series in Yarnton Village Hall, and used the Pilgrim Course material on the Lord’s prayer. This was attended by a small but excellent regular group and led to deepening discussions. Our sense was that the pandemic had affected the rhythms of weekly life and attendance was

lower than it might have been, whilst the conversations and fellowship of a smaller group were noticeably rich , and were a blessing in themselves. We had aimed to draw newcomers to the series by offering midweek sessions in the Village Hall.

The church in the community

William Fletcher School: We have been thankful for our relationship with the school, and for the support of their headteacher, Mrs Deborah Nind. Key Stage 2 visited the church for the traditional Christmas service in December, after a two year gap in visits. This was a joyful occasion. The Rector led a Christmas assembly in school for Key Stage 1.

Rev'd Oliver Petter is a school governor along with one member of our PCC who sits on the School Governing Body. Both were regularly involved as welcomers/stewards on the school gate to oversee the one-way entry system to the school under Covid-19 protocol.

Village News We continue to be grateful for our page in Yarnton Village News, and the possibilities of publicising church activities through it. This was helpful as we were able to keep villagers in touch with the church during lockdown and to continue to offer Christian reflections.

Church Life

Open church Keeping the church open is a valuable and cherished part of our ministry. We were grateful for all those who kept the church open.

Foodbank The Foodbank collection point continued to be used in the early months of the year.

Church cleaning Thanks are due to all those who cleaned St Bartholomew's church during 2021.

Bell ringers We continue to be grateful to our band of bellringers for their superb ringing, and it was a joy when this was able to resume after a long pause.

Tea & coffee Thanks to all who served refreshments after Sunday services at the start of the year. This was much appreciated by regulars and visitors alike. The loss of post service fellowship during the pandemic had been keenly felt.

Flowers We had been enormously grateful to Marion Jones who had been the main church florist for a long time. She stepped back during the pandemic. We were grateful to Rachel Woods, Pauline Watt Smith and Sarah Eaton for beginning a new rota as church life resumed in the latter part of the year.

Fundraising

The pandemic sadly limited our fundraising possibilities considerably. We were hugely grateful to Sue Fincher for continuing to bring good cheer and energy to fundraising, and for organizing further Zoom Quizzes, as well as a quiz in the village hall at the end of the year. These were fun evenings amidst the year's challenges, and also helpful fundraisers.

We also owe great thanks to Pauline Franklin who once again completed the annual Ride and Stride raising money for St Bartholomew's and for the Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust.

Ordinands in Training

The parish remains committed to supporting the learning and formation of future clergy, and it has been a gift to have three ordinands spending time in the parish during a 2022. Jonathan Roberts continued a two-year placement as part of a Context Based Training pathway at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, from October 2020- June 2022. Jonathan spent 2 days each week in the Benefice – Thursdays and Sundays in the Michaelmas term, being involved in the full range of parish activities both in person and online, and made a considerable contribution. Andrew Bailey, a second-year ordinand at St Stephen's House, finished a two term placement. He was involved in planning and preparing our Holy Week reflections booklet. Tim Davies began a two term placement and assisted with our study group programme, and co-led some sessions.