

St Bartholomew's Church, Yarnton
Annual Parish report 2020



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

2020 was dominated by the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Following some cautionary restrictions, the country went into full lockdown, announced on the evening of March 22nd, coming into effect the following day. This affected all aspects of our parish ministry, and the challenge was to sustain what was possible, within the restrictions of each period.

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." St Bartholomew's is one of "three

churches [in the Benefice which] are physically located on the edge of the communities which they serve, so there is little visibility of the church structures for village residents."

The profile stated that "We provide the only physical Christian presence in our parishes and welcome all denominations to join our worship. Our tradition is simple, traditional worship, although we are open to change." The new vicar was keen to continue with the regular tradition during the first year of discernment. Our Away day for 2020, with its opportunity to reflect further on the life and mission of our parish was one of the many things that was sadly lost to the pandemic.

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 2020, whilst the core offering of public worship, and pastoral care continued within the limitations, both in person and remotely/online.

In 2018 the PCC expressed a commitment to the Diocesan Vision, of which four points had great Resonance. This commitment continued to guide us in 2019 and 2020 as a foundational point of reflection.

- 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 2020 were: : Rev. Oliver Petter-Incumbent, John Appleton-Churchwarden, Paul Tweddle-Churchwarden, Gary Brewerton-Treasurer, Marion Jones, Charlotte Rayner-Safeguarding officer, Ian Gill, Douglas Fairhurst, Neil Small, Penny Small-PCC Secretary and Deanery Synod representative.

Achievements and performance

Worship and Prayer

At each stage of the year, worship and prayer were affected by the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and the year is divided up as such:

January- March

As we began 2020, the principal pattern of worship continued to be the Parish Eucharist at 11.00am on Sundays with refreshments and fellowship after the service. Holy Communion was also celebrated on Wednesday mornings and at 8.00am on Sundays. Morning prayer and Evening Prayer were said Monday-Friday. From the beginning of March, some restrictions began to affect church life, caused by the early impact of the pandemic in England.

National Lockdown March 23^d - 3^d July

From the moment of the National lockdown our church had to be closed for worship and personal prayer. Along with churches across the land needed to find new ways of communication, and of enabling worship and prayer to continue.

We expanded our online resources and offerings, and a lot was learned very quickly.

Sunday worship and daily prayer moved onto the Facebook Live platform, streamed from the Vicarage living room. We missed Lent 4 but from Lent 5 we live streamed our Benefice Eucharist, with the Petter family present in the living room, and Malcolm Hawkins offering live musical accompaniment via Zoom.

The whole of Holy Week was live streamed including the Easter Triduum.

From Ascension Day we began to incorporate Zoom, and thereafter began to live stream Sunday worship via Zoom and Facebook Live, enabling face to face participation and post-service fellowship for those who so desired, whilst allowing others to participate via Facebook Live.

Daily prayer on Facebook Live had a small but faithful following and was a consistent outreach.

From the beginning of the first lockdown, the Vicar began to send out Benefice emails and updates, with Benefice news and prayer resources. This became a weekly email, with extra emails for special occasions and on an ad hoc basis. The email offered links to our online services, and also provided

a Worship Sheet with readings, prayers and a reflection linking to the Sunday readings. This was written each week by Rev'd Dr Richard Turnbull, resident of Begbroke.

Restrictions easing 4th July onwards.

Government guidelines enabled us to re-open the church for public worship from Saturday July 2nd and our first Sunday service was July 3rd. We resumed with only our 11am service. The church had been risk assessed in accordance with the Diocese of Oxford protocol. There was 2m distancing between households. All kneelers and cushions were removed, along with service booklets and anything that could be passed around. Singing was not permitted, apart from by a single person. Holy Communion was distributed in one kind only. No gathering was allowed after the service. The celebration of the Eucharist was stripped back to the core elements. There was advice that those who were vulnerable should exercise great caution in attending public worship. Our services nonetheless maintained a momentum, with some new faces coming, whilst many of our congregation exercised wise caution and did not return to public worship at that point. We continued to offer online worship on Sundays.

From 16th August we resumed our Sunday 8am Holy Communion, and from 12th August 9.30am Wednesday Holy Communion resumed.

Morning and Evening Prayer took place in the churchyard, and over the summer months there were regularly 4- 6 people gathering on weekday evenings for Evening Prayer, with a growing sense of a praying community.

We celebrated Harvest Festival on October 4th.

Second National Lockdown November 5th - December 2nd

During the second National Lockdown, we reverted to online worship with services livestreamed from St Michael's Begbroke and a core of 5 people enabling this.

December 3rd onwards - return of public worship: Advent and Christmas.

Restrictions in December 2020 continued to limit numbers via 2m social distancing, and only 6 singers were permitted in church. This was a great sadness during the Advent and Christmas season where singing would usually be at the heart of worship at a time when many occasional worshippers visit.

A wide range of Christmas Services were offered in church: Carols by candlelight; Crib service (with one other flooded off due to the flooding in church lane!) Midnight Mass and Christmas morning. We decided that it was necessary to introduce a reservation system for these services. Carols by candlelight, Crib Service and Midnight Mass were all booked up. Ultimately the numbers dropped for all the bookings for good reasons, with rising infection rates, new restrictions, and the flooding. The services were memorable for us gathering outside in the churchyard to sing two or three congregational carols at the end.

Online worship

We streamed an online Christingle service, and Crib service from the Vicarage, whilst a Carol service was live streamed from St Michael's Begbroke.

We offered a broad range of online Advent/Christmas services and reflections. A daily Jesse Tree reflection was broadcast on Facebook Live and these gained a good following and level of engagement.

There was encouragement that the online offerings reached out 'beyond the church walls.' William Fletcher school offered some assemblies having seen the online Jesse Tree, and some parents had seen the craft resources.

Three Café Create sessions were live streamed, along with two accompanying craft videos. The latter were relatively popular.

Occasional Offices – Weddings, Baptisms, Funerals.

Weddings

Three Weddings took place in St Bartholomew's – the wedding of Andrew Hotchen and Laura Armitage on August 30th, the wedding of Mark Hall and Ellie Matthews on September 27th, and the wedding of Ian Pritchard and Leanne Abram on October 10th. Whilst two of these had been postponed and had logistical challenges with numbers attending restricted, they were extremely special occasions.

Sadly, two weddings were postponed due to the pandemic and two more were moved from St Bartholomew's after Yarnton Manor was put up for sale and cancelled the couples' wedding receptions at short notice.

There was one service of Dedication and Thanksgiving after a Civil Marriage.

Baptisms

One Baptism took place – of Rebecca Wiggins on August 16th. This was a joyful moment. Sadly, the Baptism of 5 other children had to be postponed due to the pandemic.

Confirmation

One Confirmation was postponed due to the Pandemic.

Funerals

There were 9 Funerals of Parishioners over 2020. 3 took place in the church, 4 at the Crematorium and 2 at Yarnton Cemetery.

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

Parish Life

Electoral Roll

In 2020 we revised our electoral roll. The total number of people on it was 50, an increase of 2.

Deanery Synod

Penny Small was elected as Deanery Synod representative at the APCM in 2019 and remained in post through 2020. 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.

Pastoral Care

Visiting: Pre-lockdown:

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.

Rev'd Oliver Petter and Rev'd Jim Turner visited The Sanctuary care home regularly, and there were also ad hoc pastoral visits to Erdington house.

Little Sheep: Charlotte Rayner continued to lead the weekly term time gathering in the Spencer Chapel, which is much appreciated by many families. Craft activities, songs, games are offered, as well as short time of prayer.

After lockdown one:

Pastoral visiting Pastoral contact was greatly restricted. At the peak periods of restrictions, pastoral visiting was restricted to end-of-life ministry and pastoral funeral ministry. Pastoral conversations by phone were encouraged during these periods or meeting outside where possible.

Pastoral contact by phone and outdoors continued to be prioritized for the whole year, with restrictions varying at different points.

Rev'd Oliver Petter and Rev'd Jim Turner kept in touch with members of the parish and Benefice by telephone, and tried to maintain particular contact with those living alone and those who were vulnerable. Thanks are due to Jim Turner for his dedicated pastoral ministry.

Mission and Evangelism

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. It was attended by a mixture of members of St Bartholomew's congregation and other families from the village. In December 2019 we had 30 at our gathering. Four Café Creates were planned for 2020 but were prevented from taking place due to lockdown.

In Advent we offered three online Café Create sessions, experimenting with the online format via Zoom. Aspects of the sessions worked well, but participation was fairly small, with 6 or 7 people taking part.

Study Group

The Wednesday evening study group at the vicarage had met through 2019 studying various material together including a new course on Holy Communion and materials produced by the Bishop of Oxford. In 2020 a Lent course looking at the churches response to Climate Crisis began, and several people signed up. We were using the book *Saying yes to God*, by Ruth Valerio. However only one session was possible before pandemic-related isolation and then the lockdown prevented 'in person' gatherings. The series was postponed.

Benefice Away day

Benefice away day had been planned for March but was postponed due to the lockdown.

In the later part of the year conversations continued between the Vicar and Will Donaldson, head of the Diocese of Oxford New Communities Initiative, regarding our mission and outreach within the village. From this conversation an ordinand was sent to our parish for the autumn term 2020 (and Hilary term 2021) to work on New Communities outreach, with a view to taking forward the Café Create gatherings. The continuing restrictions led to this being largely an online project.

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. The school visited the church for Founders Day in January. However the traditional Harvest Festival visit in September and Christmas service in December were not possible. The vicar led an assembly just before lockdown.

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.

Christian Aid collection: We were unable to carry out our regular fundraising for Christian Aid with Christian Aid week falling less than two months into the first lockdown.

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.

War Memorial and Remembrance Sunday: On Remembrance Sunday an invited group of village representatives gathered at the Yarnton war memorial at 11am for a service led by the Vicar. This was livestreamed via our Facebook page for those who wished to participate. The traditional afternoon parade and service could not take place due to restrictions.

Carol singing: Planned Carol singing was cancelled due to very poor weather.

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 in the period of the year prior to the first lockdown. Sadly due to the pandemic we were required to keep our church closed for personal prayer and visits for much of the year after the first lockdown. During the summer months we opened the church with members of our community overseeing the protocol.

Foodbank The Foodbank collection point continued to be used in the early months of the year. After the first lockdown the village set up a Help Hub via the Yarnton Community Facebook page, with collection points in Budgens, the Red Lion and at William Fletcher School. The closed church was a less convenient collection point and members of our community diverted their foodbank donations to other points.

Church cleaning Thanks are due to those who cleaned St Bartholomew's church for their dedication and care in keeping the interior of the church so clean during the periods when we could open.

Bell ringers We continue to be grateful to our band of bellringers for their superb ringing prior to the first lockdown. Sadly after the first lockdown, bellringing was suspended due to the protocol.

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. When we were able to return to services in church, we were sadly unable to serve tea and coffee. The loss of post service fellowship was keenly felt.

Flowers The beautiful flower displays in church in the early part of the year and in the periods where we opened for worship were warmly appreciated, and thanks are offered to our excellent florists.

Fundraising

The pandemic sadly limited our fundraising possibilities considerably. We were hugely grateful to Sue Fincher for organizing Zoom Quizzes. These were fun evenings amidst the year's challenges, and also helpful fundraisers.

We also owe great thanks to Pauline 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 an extraordinary year.

Oliver Wright, a first-year ordinand at Wycliffe Hall spent a month on parish placement from June-July 2020, and was involved in preaching, pastoral visiting (within restrictions), service preparation, and general parish life. It was an extraordinary time to come on placement and Oliver did a lot to help set up for the return to public worship in July.

Andrew, a second-year ordinand at St Stephen's House, began a two term placement intended to be looking at New Communities work, with additional supervision from Will Donaldson, head of the Diocesan New Communities work. He was involved in planning and preparing our online Advent resources.

Jonathan Roberts began a two-year placement as part of a Context Based Training pathway at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, from October 2020-June 2022. This was initiated by +Colin Fletcher. 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 valuable contribution.