

2020

Annual Report of the PCC



**Didcot
All Saints'
Church**

Introduction

Open to God

Open to Everyone

Open to Change

This report provides a reflection of the life at All Saints' and outlines the wonderful activities that all its members undertake in order to sustain our life of faith, prayer and fellowship. We extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who makes All Saints' a warm and welcoming community.

All Saints' Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility for working with the incumbent, Revd Dr Andy Lord, in promoting the whole mission of the church: pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. The PCC also has responsibility for maintaining the church of Didcot All Saints', the churchyard and the Youth and Community Hall.

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 All Saints'. The PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the parish and, through our Mission Action Plan, aims to witness to the love of God within the local community and the wider world. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament.

When planning our activities for the year, we have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. In

particular, we try to enable everyone to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the gospel and encountering God.
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Missionary and outreach work.

We have drawn inspiration from the window of Martha and Mary, who illustrate the need for us to pause in prayer to enable action in the world. All Saints' seeks openness with Jesus in worship and mission, rooted in a welcoming place.

This last year has been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic which has affected every area of church life. This rhythm of prayer/worship and mission/action has sustained us and enabled us to keep serving others. Our buildings have been less accessible in person, although more accessible online. They remain places of welcome that draw us to God.

All Saints' has been responsible for the legal overview of Great Western Park Church, which is designated as a Fresh Expression of Church. An annual report for the Great Western Park Church is given as an appendix to this report. The church became a Conventional District in January 2021.

Volunteers

We would like to thank all the volunteers who work so hard to ensure the smooth running of our church – its services, community outreach, the building itself, the hall and the churchyard.



In particular we would like to mention our churchwardens, Alastair Adams and Brenda Andrews, who have helped steer us through this pandemic year, providing wisdom and much practical help.

Achievements and Performance

Throughout 2020, the church community continued to build on the vision set out in the Mission Action Plan, reflected in our PCC subgroups. The four areas of focus are:

- Worship, prayer and faith development
- Mission and outreach
- Sustaining the work of the church
- Maintenance and development of the church buildings and environment

Worship, prayer and faith development

The coronavirus pandemic has affected the number of services we have been able to hold in the church building. We celebrated three baptisms and one wedding this year. In addition, we provided 15 funeral services of which only four were held in church with others taking place at other premises such as a crematorium.

The updated Electoral Roll, as presented to the 2020 APCM contained 70 members.

Music

2020 was a very challenging year for all of us, and not least musically.

Our normal pattern of rehearsals and services went out of the window overnight, but we are extremely proud of what we have managed to achieve despite the challenges of working remotely. The commitment of those able to contribute to the digitally based 'virtual choir' recordings has been admirable, amounting to countless hours of work from all concerned.

Since we moved to virtual singing, we have put together 108 hymns for the streamed services (plus the Eucharist setting, and Benedictus), generating in the process almost 100GB of data

The choir is greatly looking forward to being able to make music live again (once that is both permitted and safe), when the sound of voices singing together in worship will return in our building.

We are extremely grateful to Paul Hedley, our Director of Music, for all he has done in leading the virtual choir and in helping with relaying services from the church.

Prayer

Lottie and Peter Sumner continue to lead Quiet Space, giving an opportunity to a small group of people drawn from a number of churches in the town to gather for contemplative prayer. As with other church activities, the group needed to adapt to lockdown restrictions, with e-mailed reflections replacing meetings in the church building.

Over the past year the Healing Group, which is co-ordinated by Stuart Roberts, has kept in touch by e-mail to share requests for prayer and for monthly up-dates.

We would like to thank all who are involved with the Healing Group who have continued to keep in touch by phone and e-mail with those who need our support, either directly or through family and friends.

Hopefully, the group will soon be able to meet together again.

Faith development

A number of small groups began a Lent course using the *Helpful Habits* material for developing personal prayer. However, this was brought to an abrupt halt when the first lockdown came into effect in March.

Fellowship groups

The Monday Night fellowship group started the year by continuing to consider C S Lewis. In February, the

group met for a fellowship meal at the Boar's Head. Unfortunately, the group has not been able to meet since the lockdown restrictions came into effect in March.

Sadly, the Natter Knitters weren't able to meet at all in 2020. They are really looking forward to meeting again and are hoping to celebrate the occasion with a lunch.

Young at Heart managed one meeting – an enjoyable Coffee and Cake in Jean Holderness' garden – before having to stop their usual get togethers. However, the group have been able to keep in touch by telephone throughout the various lockdowns.

Sunday School

Sunday school started the year, as usual, following the lectionary set for the year, but our sessions were cut short by the advent of the Coronavirus epidemic, in March. We enjoyed 'Christingle at Candlemas' in January and Elizabeth's baptism in February. Unfortunately, due to the Coronavirus lockdowns, we were unable to conduct any further Sunday School sessions for the remainder of the year. However, we are planning to resume our activities from September 2021.

Mission and outreach

In the light of the financial position of the church, the PCC reluctantly took the decision to reduce the amount of money given to missions and charities from 10% to 5% of its income. This led the Mission and Outreach Sub-committee to re-focus its strategy. The PCC has made a commitment to continue financial support to the TRAIN youth work project, which left only a small sum available for supporting other projects.

In response to the reduced budget, the sub-committee made a commitment to giving of time, talents and prayer for the organisations that All Saints' has traditionally supported.

The congregation was asked to provide information on the organisations that they are members of. This allowed a booklet to be produced that demonstrates the congregation is not just people who attend church services on a Sunday but are active within the community throughout the week. The various organisations are also highlighted in the prayer page of the news sheet.

Some of the initiatives arising from the sub-committee have led to increasing links with local families. These are discussed in detail in the section on community outreach given later in this report.

At the start of the year, Noreen Kennedy stood down from the sub-committee after many years of support. We are very thankful for all that Noreen has contributed.

The sub-committee has exciting plans for the future. If you would like to be involved in developing these plans you would be very welcome to join the sub-committee.

Schools

Having run school assemblies at both Manor and Stephen Freeman Schools at the start of the year, these came to an abrupt halt in March 2020: we are anticipating resuming these from September (2021).

Our relationship with Manor School has resumed, following the enforced quiet spell.

We supported a Prayer Space at Stephen Freeman School in February. Currently, we are in discussion regarding a potential Prayer Space at Manor School in the Autumn (of 2021). We also hope to host a Carol Service at All Saints Church, in December.

Bell Ringing

With three ringers (Bertie Doy, Andrew Jones and Peter Jones), we started the year ringing on most Sunday mornings and holding practices on Monday evenings as people's availability allowed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic no ringing took place from late March, with one exception – Andrew and Peter Jones (as members of the same household) recorded some ringing on two bells for use in the Christmas morning service.

23rd Didcot Scout Group

Unfortunately, we have no report on the scout group this year.

Didcot Garden Town

The Didcot Garden Town project has continued through 2020 and has highlighted a number of the larger projects such as the new road infrastructure money that has been obtained, business and research park developments, the Gateway project and improvements to the cycle network. A number of areas of Didcot are marked for more housing development with over 10,000 new homes either approved or under construction. The development on Valley Park, between Great Western Park and the A34, is delayed but there are still plenty of other houses being built!

There is a new advisory board for the Garden Town within the district councils and we have been encouraged to join Sounding Boards. Andy Lord, the Bishop's Advisor for Didcot Garden Town, attended the first of these and contributed some thoughts on how we need to link the big projects with local community activities. Ali Adams has been involved facilitating a number of conversations across the community. It has been good to hear about local concerns for the environment and more sustainable networks of travel.

The churches' response to the housing developments over 2020 have focused, at All Saints', on the appointment of Sasha Braun as curate to start in July 2021. She will be based at All Saints' but have time allocated to reaching out with others in new areas. The Laing's charity have very generously offered to provide housing for the long term that will enable us to be alongside others in developing community generally and in drawing people together in faith. It is

great to have a personal involvement in these new areas. Ladygrove Church are reaching out to those moving into the new housing on the north edge of the estate. Great Western Park Church continue to engage with the council on the community buildings (with joys & frustrations!). Jonathan Mobey, Rector in Harwell & Chilton, has established a new Youth & Children's Work trust that draws together a number of churches from across Greater Didcot. This is seeking funding from the Diocese with the aim of nurturing our young people in faith and enabling them to reach out with the good news of Jesus.

Within the Anglican church, we have established a Great Didcot Group chaired by David Tyler, Assistant Archdeacon. This comprises the incumbents and meets every few months to focus on our joint mission across the growing Didcot area. It gives chance for us to share and learn together as we step out in faith. Reflections on the area continue to be a theme in the Deanery plan and work on this will be needed in the coming months. There is an awareness that the reduced income in many churches will bring challenges to maintaining the ministry and mission we would like.

Many agencies and charities have responded to the pandemic with great sacrifice and creativity and it was good to highlight the work of SOFEA and Didcot Food Bank in the All Saints' Harvest special online events. Interviews brought some of their work alive to us and we are encouraged to support them. We are also aware of the development of Didcot Community Partnership seeking to address many of the family issues raised before and

during the pandemic. It has been harder to build on some of the relationships with these agencies over this last year, when we have been unable to meet in person, and the demands on their time have soared. Yet we continue to seek creative ways forward together.

Sustaining the work of All Saints'

All Saints' Church

Total receipts on unrestricted funds were £54,019.68 of which £39,247.47 was unrestricted planned voluntary donations, and a further £8,493.96 was from Gift Aid. There was a deficit for the year of £17,640.60 before the transfer of £10,000 to the Building Fund, making a total deficit of £27,640.60. This was a further significant increase in the deficit from last year, which was £21,834.76.

The planned giving through the Parish Giving Scheme, Envelopes and banker's orders decreased again by 4.43% on top of the 3.7% decrease last year. Total income was down by 14.5% on top of the 7.63% compared with last year. This was partly due to the impact of COVID from March, which curtailed general collections, weddings and fundraising.

£71,660.28 was spent from unrestricted funds to provide the Christian ministry from All Saints' Church. This was a 4.53% decrease on 2019, which had increased 4.5% on the previous year. Much of this increase was due to the contribution to the diocesan parish share, which increased by 4.6% in the year. Maintenance and Running costs, which had been rising in previous years, were very similar to last year.

During the year, the total fund balances decreased from £139,353.81 to £105,713.58 of which £94,380.64 is unrestricted.

The Independent Examiner is Haines and Co. of Wallingford. The PCC's bank accounts are held with the

Barclays and NatWest Banks. The PCC is a charity registered with the Charity Commission.

The Youth and Community Hall

The running of the hall was disrupted by COVID during 2020, being forced to close from March 23rd.

Income was therefore significantly decreased with only £8,011.52 being received in fees, compared to £25,705 in 2019. However, we did qualify for a Government Business rate grant for Community Halls, administered by the district council, which provided a further £11,539. The expenditure also decreased from £19,728 to £16,037.85, but many of the costs still remained even though the hall wasn't being used, including servicing and maintenance. This meant that there was still a reduced operating surplus of £3,512.67 prior to depreciation. This would not have been the case without the government support.

It should be noted that whilst there remains a surplus of assets over liability, we need to build up reserves for any major expenditure, especially as there remains significant cracking of the walls which remain under investigation and could be expensive to fix.

Reserves Policy

It is PCC policy to try to maintain a balance on free reserves (net current assets) to smooth out fluctuations in cash flow and to meet emergencies. The balance of the free reserves at the year end was £94,380.64, which is lower than last year.

The balance of £11,332.94 in the restricted funds is principally retained towards maintaining the building and meeting the upkeep of the churchyard. In addition, there is a restricted fund, held for Great Western Park Church, which had a year-end balance of £62,027.05.

It is our policy to invest the short-term investment fund balances with the CCLA Church of England Deposit Fund.

Maintaining and developing the church building and churchyard

Churchyard

Throughout the year, a slightly smaller team of volunteers have continued to work regularly, once or twice a month, to maintain the churchyard. Covid 19 has affected our numbers, with some volunteers needing to shield to protect themselves or others, and so we were not able to tackle any bigger projects, but instead continued to do our best to keep the churchyards mown and tidy.

We continue to establish level grass over the graves, when 'man-power' is available, in order to make mowing safer and easier. Another casualty to Covid was our annual Big Tidy Up where we usually tackle the heavier things such as boundaries with a larger group of helpers.

Sadly during the course of the year we have lost several of the rowan trees in the church field due to disease, and strong winds have ultimately brought them down. We now have the opportunity to think about whether they should be replaced, and if so, with what type of tree.

The two wooden seats in the new churchyard have also succumbed to age and rot, and so we need to think about appropriate good-quality replacements. They are appreciated by visitors who come to tend graves and like to sit a'while.

In terms of other maintenance, we still have an amount of outstanding lime mortar work throughout the churchyard which has been delayed. The work is very weather dependent and requires specialist contractors.

Other projects delayed by Covid were the new cremations memorial area on the eastern side of the new churchyard, and the replacement of the church bell tower ladder. We hope to get these moving along again in 2021.

As we mentioned last year, the average age of the group is creeping evermore upwards and more younger volunteers are urgently needed to help us keep our churchyards tidy, safe and welcoming.

The possibility of the front and north churchyards being formally closed is ongoing. If they can be, then the town or district council will take over the maintenance at a basic level.

Church Path and Lighting Project

With all permissions in place and a contractor agreed, works started on site 10th February. Firstly, the uneven Yorkshire stone path leading up to the church porch was lifted and removed from site - later sold on and monies received ploughed back into the project. Some of the better stone slabs were used to form the entrance aprons under the lych gate and adjacent the porch. With better path gradients this enabled us to lay a level entrance into church so removing one of the steps up into the porch - that then delivered easier access for all. The coloured tarmac path was soon laid linking these two York stone aprons. A gravel path was then constructed to link the front of

the church around to the hall, so giving a clean sound surface under foot. Jennifer & Stuart Roberts kindly donated a tonne of fine gravel so that the existing path between the hall and churchyard could then be resurfaced.

New Lighting standards were installed in late March so that the footpath could be illuminated from the lych gate straight through to the hall. New improved lights were also fixed to the west side of the church. Final electrical connections were completed on 20th April, which included automatic summertime adjusting timeclocks. These works have vastly improved people's ease of access around the church, especially during the hours of darkness.



The reactions to the finished project have been great - easy, safe access throughout and removal of so many trip hazards. The lighting in the evenings making access feel a lot safer.

The final cost of the project was £41,850.64 but after the benefit of various grants All Saints' paid £13,793.14, making a significant long term improvement with excellent value

for money. This was only possible with the hard work of Sue Scane and Ali Goodall who secured a grant towards the project of £22,000 from FCC - they distribute landfill tax to help fund community projects. To release this grant a 11% contribution had to be paid by a third party, so I would like to thank Sue Scane and her family for this generous donation to make this project happen.

Noticeboards

After all the various planning and DAC permissions were in place, two new noticeboards were installed at All Saints' during the summer: one in the current churchyard and another on the approach to the hall. We would like to thank Julia Buckel for all her effort in sourcing and getting these two useful noticeboards into the ground. They have proved very useful in this past year with keeping people up to date with what has happened within church and all the changes that we have all had to cope with. They are also vital in displaying our various churchyard rules - these in turn help our volunteers who maintain our grounds at All Saints. In the future they will also advertise events at church and within the hall. The cost of both boards was just over £2,500.



Tree works

After a tree inspection, we have found that several trees needed professional work. A severe storm last year damaged a few trees including many of the Rowan trees lining the church field margin; unfortunately these trees were also badly infected with Ganoderma fungus which made them vulnerable to wind damage. The remaining three Rowans will be felled and we will look at replanting in the future - perhaps we could think of individually sponsoring a tree to replace those lost?

The ancient Yew, which has a Tree Preservation Order, will have some specialist work as multiple new growths on the trunk have grown then failed after strong wind have rocked their attachment points. There will be a reduction in the canopy to allow fewer but stronger branches to grow and mature.

SODC has granted planning permission for all these works to go ahead.



Bell Tower Ladder

It was highlighted that we needed to replace the bell tower ladder for Health and Safety reasons. We have had a couple of quotes for this work and a DAC faculty to proceed with the works has been applied for.

The replacement ladder will be made of aluminium and powder coated brown to match the oak beams. It will pivot at the top of the bell tower so allowing it to be pulled back in position much like a standard ladder. It will have a lower section which will slide down to anchor on the floor. There will also be a protective section so that when in the rest position against the wall it cannot be climbed. The current wooden ladder is vertical and attached to the cross beams so that you can't actually use some of the rungs as you climb up, hence the architect recommending this safety improvement for access. We look forward to seeing this being installed during 2021.

All Saints' Youth and Community Hall



Demand for Hall hire continued to be strong at the start of 2020 and many booking requests had to be refused due to the shortage of suitable booking

slots. However, the Covid-19 pandemic caused the Hall to be abruptly closed in March when national lockdown started and it remained closed until September 13th.

The second lockdown meant that the Hall had to close again on 5th November and it was still closed at the end of 2020. As the lockdown eases and the Hall fully re-opens, we hope to re-organise some regular booking times in order to allow more efficient usage of the facilities.

The PCC remains extremely thankful to the volunteers on the Hall management committee for ensuring the hall operates smoothly. Some routine maintenance and general tasks continue to be carried out, as required, by Paul Smith on an hourly rate, others are done by volunteers.

During 2020, monitoring of the wall cracks revealed seasonally cyclical movement as previously. One new thin crack appeared on the east wall at the south end.

Following advice from Price and Myers, three trial pits were dug around the North and East walls to establish the integrity of the footings. It was established that at the NE corner (where the cracking is worst) the footings were indeed faulty with the block work overhanging footings and what appeared to be some loose rubble between the bottom of the blocks and the top of the footings. Although no immediate work was necessary, Price and Myers recommended traditional underpinning for about 20m along the N and E walls. They quoted for preparing an Invitation to Tender document but are unable to provide project

management services for such a project.

In August, a wireless network link was constructed to allow Internet access from the church, which required two additional mains power sockets to be installed above the chair cupboard in the main hall. A small amount of work was carried out in the office to facilitate the wireless network connection to the church.

Finances were obviously impacted by the Covid-19 enforced closures but this was offset by a Small Business Grant of £10,000 from SODC, for which we are very grateful to the Treasurer as the application process required substantial work. Full finance details are presented separately. Nicky Tarling is still employed as the cleaner but was placed on the Government furlough scheme for the periods when the Hall was closed due to Covid-19 related restrictions.

Updating of the Terms and Conditions continued during 2020.

Helen Barrett resigned at the start of the year and Anne Phillips was employed as temporary administrator. In October, a formal recruitment process was undertaken resulting in Anne being employed permanently.

Community Outreach

Rev. Debbie Lord has started a ministry as Priest in the Community and has provided the following report on what was done in 2020.

Having followed God's call to come to Oxfordshire in August 2019, we were, at the start of 2020 beginning to find our way around our new surroundings, getting to know neighbours and church family and enjoying the experience! Throughout those early months the call to pray for Didcot and especially those yet to discover God's love for themselves took us into new and varied conversations. This adventure continued even through the subsequent unexpected global pandemic, as all of us grappled with the challenges that each lockdown brought. To say that 2020 was an unprecedented year of change is of course an understatement. But even though there was and still is much to ponder, grieve, and learn from in the sorrows of 2020, there is also reason to give thanks and remember with gladness. God is no stranger to human suffering and displacement, and as I look back through some of the activities we participated in, I see creative and warm grace notes which are signs of His presence in the life of our community.

Alongside the online Sunday services that Andy and others contributed to, Hannah, Simeon and I offered Midweek Worship; contemporary songs, prayers and a short thought for the day which were taken up by a variety of people, not all of them previously connected to any church. We were encouraged by

the number of people tuning in and also the amazing way that senior citizens- local and further afield- had risen to the challenge of learning how to use social media. Despite the limitations, these new-to-many forms of communication became a life line. And so we took these observations into our prayers, and thought about crafting new forms of worship. Thy Kingdom Come 2020, a global prayer movement was an opportunity we responded to, and our two online sessions featured readings, songs, and reflection around the thought that we as believers are called to pray for others to discover the Christian faith. It was heartening that so many church members joined in; our prayer life was strengthened.

Around this time, as a family we were getting to know our neighbours better through distanced conversations after the weekly NHS clap, and social media chats. It was an absolute treat to share musical moments from our driveway as the nation recalled VE Day, and wave at our neighbours as we enjoyed cream teas in our own safe spaces. We were becoming aware of each other's hobbies and interests, and it was obvious that people were really glad of the contact, even though it had to be at a distance. It made me aware that one of the big challenges in the pandemic was that there was nothing to look forward to for so many people. It was impossible to predict when life might 'return to its previous reality'. And with this thought and the growing sense that sharing creative gifts could help to bring fresh purpose, deeper relationships and hope, I spent time thinking about Harvest and ways to include and encourage a different kind of celebration.

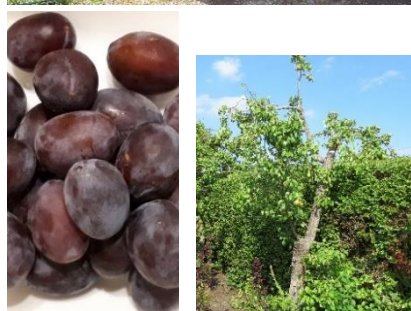


During July and August we started to prepare for an online community Harvest Festival. We called it 'Didcot Harvest Past and Present' and with the help of many people arranged for special zoom events on 25th and 27th September. Our wonderful guest presenters, Stewart and Carol Henderson, offered us encouragement, humour and literary input along the way, and we began filming conversations with church members and local farmers about their harvest memories and current harvest activities. These conversations were incredibly informative, and Hannah, Simeon and I really enjoyed the learning curve of filming; there was such warmth and welcome! Thank you to everyone who contributed. As relative newbies to Didcot we were learning about its history and geography, the challenges and richness of rural life past and present. It was also interesting that many people who have lived here for decades said that they discovered things from our subsequent presentations that they did not know! With regards to mission, this was a listening phase, and it has fed into our understanding of what makes

Didcot the evolving place that it is. It is also the case that our participants showed courage and a willingness to do something new, and for that we give thanks. Following the call of God to bless our neighbourhoods does involve stepping out of our comfort zones, and all of us have a part to play!

Into the mix of interviews, poems and history came some wonderful creative offerings: a huge collection of photos which people shared of their lockdown adventures growing plants veg and fruit; a 'guess the weight of the lardy cake' competition; potato juggling challenge (enjoyed by children and adults alike I recall!); a 'make an NHS Rainbow from fruit veg and flowers' photo opportunity; lively jazz from Simeon; specially recorded music from the choir; photos from Wantage Mill (one of the oldest left in the country) and interviews with Richard Kennell from SOFEA and Andrew Snell at Didcot Food Bank to bring the harvest provision stories bang up to date. Our online events would not have been possible without the care and computer expertise that Andy and Hannah contributed; editing film clips, sticking things together online and masterminding these events was an epic task. But it was such a worthwhile venture, and so many people who joined in were so glad to have been part of it. Our Friday night session showcased the many creative gifts in our community, and on the Sunday session we reflected on the story of Ruth, an Old Testament refugee who discovered the goodness of God during the barley harvest in Bethlehem. It seemed fitting as barley harvests in OX11 are a significant happening, and our prayer is that over time more people

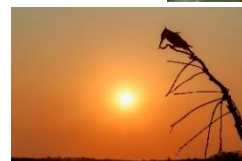
will come to discover the goodness of God in a personal way, just as Ruth did all those centuries ago.



The next step after this was crafting for an online Advent Calendar of Light. We had realised that sharing photos was something our wider community likes to do, and the idea was to provide something reflective that people could use in the run up to what was going to be a very different sort of Christmas. Our launch event on Advent Sunday with the Hendersons as guest presenters again included Carol's wonderful poem 'Unimaginable Light', a conversation about her iconography, and Stewart's poem 'Christmas Magnificat'. Our Calendar was updated daily on YouTube and had a photo, specially recorded music and a thought for the day. So many people sent us pictures on the theme of light that it was

a challenge to choose from them, but the calendar featured pictures from near and far! We are hugely grateful to Mike Kendrick and team at Wild Shots Outreach, based in Kruger National Park S.A. who sent absolutely stunning photos taken by African teenagers. If you want to know more about their vital conservation work please follow the link-

<https://www.wildshotsoutreach.org/>



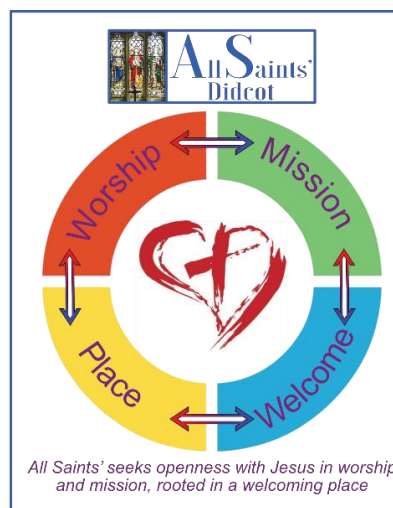
And behind all these activities was prayer. Grateful thanks must go to the small group of people who committed to pray for all these activities, asking that God would bring hope and light to many homes. We finished 2020 with joyful distanced filming of Harry and Freddie talking about their Christmas hopes, and their understanding of who baby Jesus is. Another reminder that we all have a part to play in sharing the Good News in our communities-however young or old we are! For that is the best news of all; *God moved into the neighbourhood, became one of us so that we might know his friendship and goodness in life's adventures.*

We have continued to reach out especially to families with children at

home since then, and are excited about the opportunities ahead.

Vicar's Report

At the start of 2020, I had been at All Saints' for four months and we were reviewing our life and mission together, which was helping me settle and understand what everyone valued about All Saints'. This was interrupted rather suddenly by the pandemic that changed everything whilst also perhaps highlighting more clearly what we wanted to hold onto together. I came back to reflect on all that had been shared in November and came up with the following diagram:



We value All Saints' as a place of welcome, seeking to develop worship for the regulars and mission in the community. The side chapel window of Mary and Martha continues to speak to me of our desire to keep together the closeness to Jesus in prayer and worship with the active mission in our local (and wider) community, seeking to serve and witness in Didcot and beyond. We have collected a great list of the community groups that we are each involved in and put together a cycle of prayer that embraces these alongside our mission charities, community concerns and individual

needs. At the heart of our life is the love of God seen in Christ.

During the pandemic we have continued these same themes, if in different ways. Our worship moved online and become more varied. We have had challenges with streaming from church but great work has been done on this by a number of people; the virtual choir has kept us in touch with familiar voices lifted up in worship – thanks to Paul for a huge amount of work on this; Quiet Space has provided monthly reflections at home – thanks to Peter & Lottie; the Healing Group with monthly prayer themes via email – thanks to Stuart & Jennifer; and we have tried shorter YouTube worship from home – with thanks to Debbie, Simeon & Hannah. In the early months, I provided reflections each week to help us think and pray through the challenges, which have now transformed into a monthly ministers letter. We have settled into a routine of weekly Facebook live services and tried Zoom services around Easter, Ascension and Thy Kingdom Come. Plenty of learning going on! Our faith has often been stretched but this is so often the invitation to growth. We are encouraged to be honest about what we have lost and found so difficult and to see the God who is found in the wounded Christ who embraces us.

Mission in the community has become more challenging with the distancing and lockdowns, although phone calls, Zoom and help with food and transport have made such a difference for people. With the significant challenges families have faced, we have tried a mix of online specials around the festivals with activity bags distributed to a

growing number of children, many of whom have not been regular at All Saints' (with thanks to all involved in this). Who knows where this will lead! We did some brilliant Harvest online specials that drew on the wisdom of many at All Saints' as well as those in the farming community and local food charities.



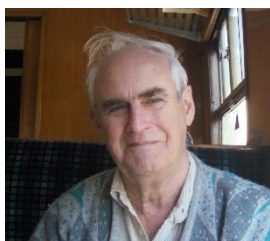
Although we have not been able to welcome people into our church building, we continue to welcome people virtually and have seen a number of people become regular at All Saints' over Facebook who were not before. Our weekly Zoom chats have been invaluable in sustaining the lives of those of us involved, providing a place of care and prayer. All those people who phone round regularly have been doing an invaluable ministry that has helped sustain us.

Thank you so much to our Church Wardens, Brenda & Alastair, who have been an active tower of strength over the year. All the cleaning, organising, WiFi fixing, building care, wisdom, support and so much more have been much appreciated. Thanks also to everyone on the PCC as we have mined the depths of detail in Government guidelines to try and make sense of the next steps! Thanks to Sue as Treasurer, who has been a wise guide through a time when our income has gone down significantly and we are reliant on our reserves (a hint to review your giving!). We have all appreciated the time put in by the choir, by those who have learned how to record

themselves reading & interceding, and those who have kept the churchyard in such good repair. Thanks also to Anne in the office – she stepped up after Helen left as our Administrator into what has been a challenging year and has done so well! She has enabled us to open the Youth & Community Hall when guidelines have allowed, alongside the grants that Sue Scane has been able to obtain to maintain this vital community building. Personally, I have also benefitted from the support of Josie, Mark, Hugh, Tim, Nick, and of course Debbie(!), as our local ministers who have given above and beyond through the year.

Some of our plans have been inevitably on hold in regard to our buildings and churchyard but we have begun the process of closing the old parts of the churchyard (in front of and behind the building) which were full in the 1960s. This does not prevent burials in existing graves but the maintenance will transfer to the Town Council.

We do continue to give thanks for those who have left this life in the secure hope of resurrection life with Christ. This last year, amongst others, we remember Philip Shipman who served All Saints' and GWP in many ways over the years.



I have been pondering what we have been learning over this very unusual year. In many ways we have simply kept going, sought to keep sustaining ourselves in worship and caring for those around us. The months have

rushed by, from lockdown to lockdown, from hot sunshine to dull winter months. Through this we have been forcibly reminded that the Christian faith is lived out primarily in the places we live and amongst the people we meet (our 'frontline'). The church, as a gathering of Christians, exists to resource and nourish this kind of practical and outward looking faith. All Saints' has sought in different ways to resource our Christian lives with God.

We need resources for prayer and worship that are not limited to the building, but help us at home, with our families, in the challenging places. How might we continue and extend our online offerings and activity bags?

We need ways of supporting life in Christian community even when our community is distanced due to pandemic or the more general health and practical realities. How can we deepen our sense of community together?

We need to sustain lives that act for the good of others and resist the constant temptation to withdraw. How can we reach out in mission when our resources are limited?

These are questions that might guide us as we gently ease out of the restrictions. A common theme in a number of discussions in recent weeks has been that of prayer. The need to encourage one another in our lives of prayer, to deepen our experience of God, to know Jesus close by, to seek the provision of the Holy Spirit. I am so thankful for the Lord's provision over this last year, a year which was not what we expected when we arrived in Didcot! It has been great to get to know

you better and we much appreciate your kindness to our family.

This coming year we look forward to Sasha joining us as curate, with Matt, and we pray for grace, wisdom, steadfastness and hope as we walk together with Jesus.

Structure, Governance and Management

The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC is a Registered Charity.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. At All Saints', the membership of the PCC consists of the incumbent, licensed lay ministers, churchwardens, representatives on Deanery Synod and members elected by those members of the congregation who are on the Electoral Roll of the church. All those who attend our services / members of the congregation are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent. New members receive initial training into the workings of the PCC.

Given its wide responsibilities, the PCC has a number of sub-committees each dealing with a particular aspect of parish life. These committees, which include worship and faith development, mission and outreach, fundraising, building development and the Youth and Community Hall management committee, are all responsible to the PCC and report back to it. Apart from the Standing Committee, which is the

only committee required by law and has power to transact the business of the PCC between its meetings as directed by the PCC, the sub-committees are advisory and do not have executive powers.

The PCC met for six scheduled meetings through the year. After the introduction of lockdown restrictions from March, most of these were held over Zoom. The PCC also met for a number of shorter *ad-hoc* meetings mostly in order to approve risk assessments for use of the church and the hall.

Annual Parochial Church Meetings are normally held just before or just after Easter. However, the Diocese permitted much-needed flexibility by extending the deadline for holding APCMs. All Saints' held its 2020 APCM on 11th October.

The Ladygrove Church

The Ladygrove Church, which is an Anglican/Baptist Local Ecumenical Partnership, is a parish in its own right. It is still, however, a part of the All Saints' benefice.

Deanery Synod

The deanery synod provides PCCs with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the church. The Revd David Rice is the Area Dean for the Wallingford Deanery, which includes Didcot (St Peter's, All Saints', Great Western Park and Ladygrove), Harwell, Chilton, Cholsey, Moulsoford, Hagbourne, Blewbury, Upton, South & North Moreton, Aston Tirrold & Aston Upthorpe, Wallingford, Crowmarsh Gifford & Brightwell-cum-Sotwell.

Meetings of the deanery synod in 2020 were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, only two deanery synod meetings were held and four meetings of the deanery synod standing committee.

The main focus of the year was to progress the mission action plan (MAP). This was an important piece of work, designed to support the mission of individual parishes and guide the life of our synod. The MAP is designed to help the deanery to focus on the issues considered important at PCC level in order to reflect these up to the diocese, providing vital input into Bishop Steven's Common Vision. The MAP was presented to the Dorchester Mission and Pastoral Committee in October 2020 and was well received.

Our MAP has four key focus areas:

- 1. Development of ministry to children, young people & families**
- 2. Developing our outreach to new & settled communities**
- 3. Development of appropriate patterns of worship**
- 4. Development of the Ministry in the Greater Didcot Garden Town area, both financially and structurally,**

One initiative emerging from the MAP was the creation of a programme of Pilgrim Path walks across the deanery, to link parishes and benefices. Four walks were planned as part of this programme, these being Blewbury, Wallingford, the Astons and Didcot/Hagbourne. Each pilgrimage was planned to start and end with prayers and refreshments would be

included. Unfortunately, this programme was brought to an abrupt halt by the pandemic and will be rescheduled at a later date.

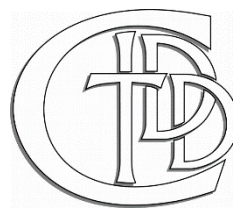
Another initiative to emerge was the Youth Initiative, working to develop a standalone Youth Trust to better equip secondary age youths; this involves churches in the Greater Didcot area and ecumenical partners.

At the meeting on the 11th of March 2020, Rachel Brockie spoke about the work of The Children's Society and how some children today live through some awful experiences. The Children's Society help by campaigning for law changes to make life safer for children at risk, helping children to access the mental health support they need, striving to stamp out the trafficking of young people and criminal exploitation etc.

The meeting on the 24th of November 2020 focused on developing the church online, acknowledging that most churches had introduced an online service facility at some point since the start of the pandemic. The guest speaker was Revd Matt Hogg from St Alban's, Fulham who spoke about online church, particularly social media, and how that can be used to connect with people, including those who attend church physically.

Finally, the Parish Share for 2021 was negotiated; this highlighted that some parishes would not be able to meet their parish share in 2021 and that others would struggle. For some parishes this is an ongoing problem, for others it is a direct result of the pandemic.

Ecumenical relationships



The church is a member of Churches Together in Didcot and District (CTDD).

A Women's World Day of Prayer service was organised in March. Plans were also drawn up for an Ecumenical Lent Study Group but that had to be cancelled.

Options were investigated for Good Friday, and Contact details for all Churches circulated for Easter.

Information was circulated to Church leaders on Services During Coronavirus.

We have not been able to have meetings of the enabling group (committee) or an AGM, due to the Coronavirus, but the offices have continued.

Andrew Jones continues as Convenor (chair).

The Didcot and District Christian Aid Committee, D & D Christian Aid, was not able to organise anything for Christian Aid Week, but information was circulated.

A Coronavirus-secure version of the Christian Aid Sponsored Walk took place in October, on the Downs, and that raised £1,118, with £430 from All Saints and £372.50 from Great Western Park. The Chilton Plant Sale raised £595.

Safeguarding

We seek to be a church that provides a safe and secure environment for the

most vulnerable in our church and in the wider community and, therefore, place major importance on the implementation of all safeguarding policies to enable this. We are working towards a vision where every member of the church sees themselves as a part of providing this environment for the most vulnerable.

[DBS \(Disclosure and Barring Service\)](#)

During the year, a number of additional people received DBS clearance for work with children, young people and vulnerable adults. The clearance provider for the Diocese is Access Personal Checking Services Ltd. as recommended by the Church of England. We are very grateful for the work that Tim Scane has carried out as verifier (viewing applicants' documents to confirm their identity) and keeping track of when people are due for renewal.

[Safeguarding Policies and Training](#)

The recommendations in the Safeguarding Policy are adhered to in all activities relating to safeguarding and recruitment. The PCC has an ongoing Promoting a Safer Church Action Plan which is reviewed annually, although the pandemic reduced our usual activities.

A copy of the Safeguarding Handbook is available in the Vicar's vestry and online. We follow its procedures for dealing with any safeguarding concern or allegation. We recognise the importance of being sensitive to any issues that may be raised and responding appropriately.

Training has continued on-line for those in the relevant roles. Eleanor Hards,

the safeguarding officer, has completed all the required training.

The Church of England from time to time also provides Safeguarding learning reviews arising from serious situations elsewhere.

[Safeguarding issues](#)

There were no major pastoral situations during 2020 which raised safeguarding issues.

During the year, the major safeguarding issue was the Covid-19 pandemic. National and Church of England guidance was followed at all times, with frequent updating, in relation to both the Church premises and the Youth and Community Hall.

[Health and Safety](#)

David Ralston has taken over responsibility for health and safety; many thanks to Peter Baker for all that he has contributed over the years.

Covid-19 has created challenges to both the church and the hall. One positive outcome of the pandemic is the reduction in risk owing to fewer people being in or around the premises. No accidents were recorded during the year and no Test and Trace contact notifications were linked to either the church or the hall. There is an expectation that further challenges will arise as the lockdown restrictions are lifted.

A lot of effort was put into production of coronavirus risk assessments for both the church and hall. In all cases, these were produced in the light of both government and Church of England guidance.

A big thank you to David for drafting the assessments and to PCC members for making time for online meetings to approve them.

We continue to look at issues around accessing the bell tower and other areas presenting fall-from-height hazards such as using the staircase giving access to the old Rood Loft.

Administrative information

All Saints' Church is situated in Lydalls Road, Didcot. It is part of the Dorchester Episcopal Area in the Diocese of Oxford within the Church of England. The correspondence address for the church is: The Administrator, All Saints' Youth and Community Hall, Roman Place, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 7ER.

The website address is:

www.didcotallsaints.org.uk



The Didcot All Saints' Church Community Page can be found on Facebook.

PCC members who have served at any time during 2020 are:

Ex-Officio members:

Incumbent: The Revd. Dr Andy Lord
Associate Minister, GWP Church:

The Revd. Mark Bodeker

Wardens: Mr Alastair Adams
Miss Brenda Andrews

Licensed Lay Ministers:

Dr Nick Hards

Dr Tim Scane

Deanery Synod Representatives:

Mrs. Alison Adams

Mrs Eleanor Hards (until October)

Mr. Andrew Jones (until October)

Elected members:

Mrs Julia Buckel (until October)

Mrs Clare Hamer

Mrs Eleanor Hards (from October)

Miss Anne Phillips

Mr David Ralston (from October)

Mrs Sue Scane (until October, co-opted November, Treasurer)

Dr Peter Sumner (Secretary)

Signed:

.....
Revd. Dr Andy Lord

Date:

.....



Great Western Park Church annual review 2020



Summary

As I write this update to the previous report prepared in October 2020, quite a lot has changed. We are planning to begin worshipping together (23rd May – Pentecost) and to do this in a new building, the GWP District Centre. Lifting of restrictions is also enabling us to plan for the reopening of our Community Café and to begin to welcome back families, who we have sadly missed during this pandemic. Meeting together virtually has ensured that the life of the church has continued, but not everyone has been able to engage with this. Like many other Churches and charity based groups, children (their parents) and those unable to manage Zoom or the internet generally have found this medium difficult (and tiring). It is one of our priorities that we reengage with these groups immediately we begin to gather again. As such, intergenerational services and a return to Morning Prayer and services of Holy Communion at Williams Place will be our primary focus.

Up until now, our 'live', interactive services have continued each week with a blend of contemporary worship and praise. We have focussed our bible teaching and sermons on the experience of new church congregations in the New Testament, forming in Jerusalem and in Philippi. More recently we have been looking at unanswered prayer and when God seems silent or absent. This has linked in with Life Group meetings where we have been working our way through Pete Grieg's Prayer course(s). Our services have catered for all-ages, although we recognise the difficulty for children and young people to concentrate on a live-streamed service delivered on a small screen. That said, we have enjoyed the

interactive activities which have taught bible stories and bible themes in simple, yet effective ways. We have also maintained two separate congregations with the main Sunday congregation adopting technology to meet, while those at Williams Place sharing a weekly reflection service which has been faithfully printed and distributed by staff to around a dozen residents who have worshipped from the safety of their own apartment. We have continued to offer regular reflections to our church community via a weekly Newsletter, with contributions from several of our congregation. We also meet each week for coffee and chat as part of our virtual Community Café, and have introduced a Church Quiz, recognising the importance of meeting socially. Life Groups have also continued to meet, with two new groups added, maintaining the structure and support for members both practically and spiritually.

Indeed, I am amazed and hugely encouraged by the amount of work done by so many to keep things together and to continue to offer the love of God to both our church congregation and community. In many ways it is a testament to the 'pioneering' spirit of our church and its deepening roots that we remain 'open'. It is also exciting that we are turning our efforts to opportunities for post Lockdown 'replanting' and 'flourishing'. Thank you to all of you for your faithfulness in these extraordinary times.

Establishing Traditions

One of the wonderful advantages of a relatively new church is that you can try new things. We wanted to offer a Christian community event at Christmas that focussed on 'gift' – Jesus born as a human, given without cost, offering hope and joy. Our first Carol Service on December 7th, 2019 included readings and carols and a wonderful performance by Stephen Freeman School Choir who sang to us. It was full to bursting (refer to picture below) and we were able to witness boldly, telling the story of Jesus' birth, explaining that this remained relevant to everyone. Sadly, this could not be repeated in 2020 but we will retain this as a key event in our church and community calendar going forward.



Maintaining existing ones (Traditions)

Activities Week in GWP was again popular with c 1,500 people engaging in a week of activities in July 2019, designed for children and families. At the end of the week, we invited the entire community for an evening BBQ with live music and entertainment.



Maintaining this intensity in terms of organising and running events, with a relatively small number of willing volunteers, and committing sufficient funds to ensure virtually free access to all, is demanding. Reflecting also on how we might add a more Christian focus to future events and to encourage new people to engage with GWP Church, we had planned to join with Boundary Park Sports Association to 'take over' the Sunday of their 'Bands on the Boundary' weekend event in June called 'Beyond the Boundary'. It will be like a large, traditional Church fete and another wonderful opportunity to the community together to 'reunite'. We are planning an open-air service to begin the day and then, combine interactive activities and games that would engage the whole community. BP Sports Assn. offered their facilities and infrastructure without charge. With all restrictions planned to be lifted on June 21st we hope that we will be able to go ahead with this and enjoy the day with the entire GWP community.



Progress and Challenges

GWP Church was designated a Conventional District on 20th November 2020. This triggered the transfer of those within the Leadership team onto a newly formed PCC, with an update of the Electoral Roll, election of Church Wardens – Kath Butler and Ryan Williams, along with the appointment of Deanery synod Reps. - David and Sue Hawkins. A PCC Secretary will be appointed this coming APCM on June 13th. Much of our recent focus as a PCC has therefore been to develop new structures which underpin the operations and life of the church. This has involved creating a number of sub-groups, designating leaders for each and appointing and co-opting members of the PCC or congregation to provide oversight. Subgroups include.

Children and Families
Communications
Finance and Property
Mission and Outreach
Pastoral care
Worship

These subgroups meet regularly and present to the PCC recommendations for approval. This means for a more efficient and timelier PCC with matters for decision or agreement set out by way of note for consideration beforehand.

Although remaining part of the Benefice of All Saints', and maintaining existing parish boundaries (for which the outline of GWP sits in 4 separate parishes), the establishment of a Conventional District means independence in terms of spiritual direction and early steps to becoming a separate parish. With this comes the requirement to pay Parish Share, a timetable for increasing Share set, and which the first payment is due in 2022.

I am acutely aware that this extra work is mainly placed on those whose lives are already terribly busy. We must not overburden our most committed individuals and to recognise that we cannot do everything (right now!). More and more, we must recognise the importance of accepting God's hand and leading in all of this and that it is He who sustains us. We are required just to be faithful.

The core focus of the Church – Mission



At the heart of what we do (our DNA), is mission. One of the challenges with Lockdown has been those whose faith is new, or who are on the edge of joining, and have tended to drift away when we stopped meeting together physically. It has been hard to retain them week after week on Zoom. We are now in a new phase of rebuilding. We are also blessed to have a core of dedicated congregation who have stuck at it. Our service recordings and weekly reflections sent to the entire community have also been greatly appreciated.

Challenging those who do come has continued during our services, where we focus on an application to faith which is incarnational. We have done a number of service series focussing on the new church emerging in Acts, and then for those churches in the New Testament who are establishing themselves, such as Philippians, the lessons Paul offers in terms of relying on power of the Holy Spirit, acting in unity and keeping faithful.

This discussion and challenge have continued within our Life Groups where relationship is developed, and faith strengthened.

We recognise important life events of marriage and baptisms, joining together with families to bless and to encourage. Up until lock-down there were a good number of these. We also, sadly, marked the end of life, saying goodbye to our oldest member of our congregation, Philip Shipman. He was a great supporter of our church and faithfully joined us each Sunday even as his health diminished. The Covid pandemic robbed many of the chance to attend his funeral, however we will celebrate his life and contribution to ours by way of a memorial gathering later this year.

Given the congregation dynamics, many of those who come have young families. We continued to engage with families, as best we could during lockdown, and in the absence of Claire Wren, our Children and Families worker who is currently on maternity leave, we introduced Blankety Church, where families could meet together (socially distanced) to worship simply around a Christian theme.

What might be the next steps?

Getting into a building to begin worshipping again has been a crucial first step. We are not quite there yet but will 'rejoice' when we finally get to be together in our new home in the centre of GWP, the District Centre. Again, as I write this, there is still a huge amount to do, but with the right engagement from the District Council all the ingredients are there for it to be our long-term base both for services and outreach into the community. There we plan to begin 'replanting' after a period of 'pruning' (I appreciate that I am mixing metaphors here!), advertising the church to the entire community and welcoming everyone back.

Working in the Community

After six years working as founding Governor and latterly Chair of Governors at UTC Oxfordshire, I decided to step down. This was in June (2020) and seemed the right time, coinciding with the first appointed Head teacher leaving in April and the appointment of a capable replacement. I will still maintain some connection with regular visits and assemblies but will use the additional time now available for rest and prayer.

Recent conversations with the Head suggest that the UTC will be open for inviting groups back to use the building from September. This would include GWP Church if required.

I continue to work as Trustee of the GWP Boundary Park Sports Assn. and offer time within local primary schools with visiting and assemblies.

Those who make our Church thrive.

I am incredibly grateful for so many who work so hard to underpin all the work that goes on in our Church and beyond it into the community. I sense that this is not a chore, or something done out of duty, but rather an offering of ourselves because we believe doing God's work is transformative both to individuals and communities. Many who come to our gatherings talk of the atmosphere of welcome and hospitality. This is something we offer naturally. But it needs saying, that all this would not be possible without the unconditional effort of so many. So, thank you.

The way ahead

The passage in Acts 16 where Paul and Silas find themselves locked away in prison is one of those which we remember as having a happy ending. We celebrate with both men, God answering their prayers, the earthquake and the conversion of the entire jailer's family. A mighty story of transformation and change.

But I sometimes wonder whether we miss some of the teaching in this story in the way it unfolds. Paul and Silas are being faithful and proclaiming God's mercy and grace, railing against the inequalities taking place in a place of prayer. Their orders to free a slave girl with a spirit of divination went against the interests of her owners, who stood to lose a great deal of money if this girl was healed. So, her owners accuse Paul and Silas and have them beaten and thrown into jail. Even though the story, set out in Acts, is described in few words, we realise that those who oppose these men are serious and will do whatever it takes to get things back to normal. So, Paul and Silas suffer a mock trial, are stripped, beaten with rods and then receive a severe flogging.

For those of us wanting to image the whole story, this prelude, which gets us to the point of release and conversion must have been dramatic and frightening for the two accused. Of course, this makes the miracle of the earthquake and being set free, whilst they languish in jail, even more dramatic. But what would have it been like for Paul and Silas as they waited for their fate to be determined?

We have not been in anything like similar circumstances as we have worked our way through this pandemic. But to simply jump to a 'normal' situation, the good ending, would be to ignore what we have all gone through getting to this point. It has been difficult. Most of us have suffered loss. To put it another way, we lose so much if we simply focus on the good bits, of reunion and the joy of having a hug.

We want all these people to return but are not sure that they will or how to go about reengaging with them again. This prolonged period of absence has meant for many of us a loss of contact with those we feel most comfortable with – those in our church family. So, what will it be like to meet up again? Will they remember me and to what extent should I hope that our relationships can go back to something like there were?

In our often busy and stressful lives there seems merit in offering to God our biggest fears, knowing that we do not have the answers, that it is only in the silence where we are really able to hear God speaking to us.

Mark Bodeker – May 2021 (updated)

2020

Annual Report of the PCC



**Didcot
All Saints'
Church**

Introduction

Open to God

Open to Everyone

Open to Change

This report provides a reflection of the life at All Saints' and outlines the wonderful activities that all its members undertake in order to sustain our life of faith, prayer and fellowship. We extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who makes All Saints' a warm and welcoming community.

All Saints' Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility for working with the incumbent, Revd Dr Andy Lord, in promoting the whole mission of the church: pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. The PCC also has responsibility for maintaining the church of Didcot All Saints', the churchyard and the Youth and Community Hall.

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 All Saints'. The PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the parish and, through our Mission Action Plan, aims to witness to the love of God within the local community and the wider world. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament.

When planning our activities for the year, we have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. In

particular, we try to enable everyone to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the gospel and encountering God.
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Missionary and outreach work.

We have drawn inspiration from the window of Martha and Mary, who illustrate the need for us to pause in prayer to enable action in the world. All Saints' seeks openness with Jesus in worship and mission, rooted in a welcoming place.

This last year has been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic which has affected every area of church life. This rhythm of prayer/worship and mission/action has sustained us and enabled us to keep serving others. Our buildings have been less accessible in person, although more accessible online. They remain places of welcome that draw us to God.

All Saints' has been responsible for the legal overview of Great Western Park Church, which is designated as a Fresh Expression of Church. An annual report for the Great Western Park Church is given as an appendix to this report. The church became a Conventional District in January 2021.

Volunteers

We would like to thank all the volunteers who work so hard to ensure the smooth running of our church – its services, community outreach, the building itself, the hall and the churchyard.



In particular we would like to mention our churchwardens, Alastair Adams and Brenda Andrews, who have helped steer us through this pandemic year, providing wisdom and much practical help.

Achievements and Performance

Throughout 2020, the church community continued to build on the vision set out in the Mission Action Plan, reflected in our PCC subgroups. The four areas of focus are:

- Worship, prayer and faith development
- Mission and outreach
- Sustaining the work of the church
- Maintenance and development of the church buildings and environment

Worship, prayer and faith development

The coronavirus pandemic has affected the number of services we have been able to hold in the church building. We celebrated three baptisms and one wedding this year. In addition, we provided 15 funeral services of which only four were held in church with others taking place at other premises such as a crematorium.

The updated Electoral Roll, as presented to the 2020 APCM contained 70 members.

Music

2020 was a very challenging year for all of us, and not least musically.

Our normal pattern of rehearsals and services went out of the window overnight, but we are extremely proud of what we have managed to achieve despite the challenges of working remotely. The commitment of those able to contribute to the digitally based 'virtual choir' recordings has been admirable, amounting to countless hours of work from all concerned.

Since we moved to virtual singing, we have put together 108 hymns for the streamed services (plus the Eucharist setting, and Benedictus), generating in the process almost 100GB of data

The choir is greatly looking forward to being able to make music live again (once that is both permitted and safe), when the sound of voices singing together in worship will return in our building.

We are extremely grateful to Paul Hedley, our Director of Music, for all he has done in leading the virtual choir and in helping with relaying services from the church.

Prayer

Lottie and Peter Sumner continue to lead Quiet Space, giving an opportunity to a small group of people drawn from a number of churches in the town to gather for contemplative prayer. As with other church activities, the group needed to adapt to lockdown restrictions, with e-mailed reflections replacing meetings in the church building.

Over the past year the Healing Group, which is co-ordinated by Stuart Roberts, has kept in touch by e-mail to share requests for prayer and for monthly up-dates.

We would like to thank all who are involved with the Healing Group who have continued to keep in touch by phone and e-mail with those who need our support, either directly or through family and friends.

Hopefully, the group will soon be able to meet together again.

Faith development

A number of small groups began a Lent course using the *Helpful Habits* material for developing personal prayer. However, this was brought to an abrupt halt when the first lockdown came into effect in March.

Fellowship groups

The Monday Night fellowship group started the year by continuing to consider C S Lewis. In February, the

group met for a fellowship meal at the Boar's Head. Unfortunately, the group has not been able to meet since the lockdown restrictions came into effect in March.

Sadly, the Natter Knitters weren't able to meet at all in 2020. They are really looking forward to meeting again and are hoping to celebrate the occasion with a lunch.

Young at Heart managed one meeting – an enjoyable Coffee and Cake in Jean Holderness' garden – before having to stop their usual get togethers. However, the group have been able to keep in touch by telephone throughout the various lockdowns.

Sunday School

Sunday school started the year, as usual, following the lectionary set for the year, but our sessions were cut short by the advent of the Coronavirus epidemic, in March. We enjoyed 'Christingle at Candlemas' in January and Elizabeth's baptism in February. Unfortunately, due to the Coronavirus lockdowns, we were unable to conduct any further Sunday School sessions for the remainder of the year. However, we are planning to resume our activities from September 2021.

Mission and outreach

In the light of the financial position of the church, the PCC reluctantly took the decision to reduce the amount of money given to missions and charities from 10% to 5% of its income. This led the Mission and Outreach Sub-committee to re-focus its strategy. The PCC has made a commitment to continue financial support to the TRAIN youth work project, which left only a small sum available for supporting other projects.

In response to the reduced budget, the sub-committee made a commitment to giving of time, talents and prayer for the organisations that All Saints' has traditionally supported.

The congregation was asked to provide information on the organisations that they are members of. This allowed a booklet to be produced that demonstrates the congregation is not just people who attend church services on a Sunday but are active within the community throughout the week. The various organisations are also highlighted in the prayer page of the news sheet.

Some of the initiatives arising from the sub-committee have led to increasing links with local families. These are discussed in detail in the section on community outreach given later in this report.

At the start of the year, Noreen Kennedy stood down from the sub-committee after many years of support. We are very thankful for all that Noreen has contributed.

The sub-committee has exciting plans for the future. If you would like to be involved in developing these plans you would be very welcome to join the sub-committee.

Schools

Having run school assemblies at both Manor and Stephen Freeman Schools at the start of the year, these came to an abrupt halt in March 2020: we are anticipating resuming these from September (2021).

Our relationship with Manor School has resumed, following the enforced quiet spell.

We supported a Prayer Space at Stephen Freeman School in February. Currently, we are in discussion regarding a potential Prayer Space at Manor School in the Autumn (of 2021). We also hope to host a Carol Service at All Saints Church, in December.

Bell Ringing

With three ringers (Bertie Doy, Andrew Jones and Peter Jones), we started the year ringing on most Sunday mornings and holding practices on Monday evenings as people's availability allowed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic no ringing took place from late March, with one exception – Andrew and Peter Jones (as members of the same household) recorded some ringing on two bells for use in the Christmas morning service.

23rd Didcot Scout Group

Unfortunately, we have no report on the scout group this year.

Didcot Garden Town

The Didcot Garden Town project has continued through 2020 and has highlighted a number of the larger projects such as the new road infrastructure money that has been obtained, business and research park developments, the Gateway project and improvements to the cycle network. A number of areas of Didcot are marked for more housing development with over 10,000 new homes either approved or under construction. The development on Valley Park, between Great Western Park and the A34, is delayed but there are still plenty of other houses being built!

There is a new advisory board for the Garden Town within the district councils and we have been encouraged to join Sounding Boards. Andy Lord, the Bishop's Advisor for Didcot Garden Town, attended the first of these and contributed some thoughts on how we need to link the big projects with local community activities. Ali Adams has been involved facilitating a number of conversations across the community. It has been good to hear about local concerns for the environment and more sustainable networks of travel.

The churches' response to the housing developments over 2020 have focused, at All Saints', on the appointment of Sasha Braun as curate to start in July 2021. She will be based at All Saints' but have time allocated to reaching out with others in new areas. The Laing's charity have very generously offered to provide housing for the long term that will enable us to be alongside others in developing community generally and in drawing people together in faith. It is

great to have a personal involvement in these new areas. Ladygrove Church are reaching out to those moving into the new housing on the north edge of the estate. Great Western Park Church continue to engage with the council on the community buildings (with joys & frustrations!). Jonathan Mobey, Rector in Harwell & Chilton, has established a new Youth & Children's Work trust that draws together a number of churches from across Greater Didcot. This is seeking funding from the Diocese with the aim of nurturing our young people in faith and enabling them to reach out with the good news of Jesus.

Within the Anglican church, we have established a Great Didcot Group chaired by David Tyler, Assistant Archdeacon. This comprises the incumbents and meets every few months to focus on our joint mission across the growing Didcot area. It gives chance for us to share and learn together as we step out in faith. Reflections on the area continue to be a theme in the Deanery plan and work on this will be needed in the coming months. There is an awareness that the reduced income in many churches will bring challenges to maintaining the ministry and mission we would like.

Many agencies and charities have responded to the pandemic with great sacrifice and creativity and it was good to highlight the work of SOFEA and Didcot Food Bank in the All Saints' Harvest special online events. Interviews brought some of their work alive to us and we are encouraged to support them. We are also aware of the development of Didcot Community Partnership seeking to address many of the family issues raised before and

during the pandemic. It has been harder to build on some of the relationships with these agencies over this last year, when we have been unable to meet in person, and the demands on their time have soared. Yet we continue to seek creative ways forward together.

Sustaining the work of All Saints'

All Saints' Church

Total receipts on unrestricted funds were £54,019.68 of which £39,247.47 was unrestricted planned voluntary donations, and a further £8,493.96 was from Gift Aid. There was a deficit for the year of £17,640.60 before the transfer of £10,000 to the Building Fund, making a total deficit of £27,640.60. This was a further significant increase in the deficit from last year, which was £21,834.76.

The planned giving through the Parish Giving Scheme, Envelopes and banker's orders decreased again by 4.43% on top of the 3.7% decrease last year. Total income was down by 14.5% on top of the 7.63% compared with last year. This was partly due to the impact of COVID from March, which curtailed general collections, weddings and fundraising.

£71,660.28 was spent from unrestricted funds to provide the Christian ministry from All Saints' Church. This was a 4.53% decrease on 2019, which had increased 4.5% on the previous year. Much of this increase was due to the contribution to the diocesan parish share, which increased by 4.6% in the year. Maintenance and Running costs, which had been rising in previous years, were very similar to last year.

During the year, the total fund balances decreased from £139,353.81 to £105,713.58 of which £94,380.64 is unrestricted.

The Independent Examiner is Haines and Co. of Wallingford. The PCC's bank accounts are held with the

Barclays and NatWest Banks. The PCC is a charity registered with the Charity Commission.

The Youth and Community Hall

The running of the hall was disrupted by COVID during 2020, being forced to close from March 23rd.

Income was therefore significantly decreased with only £8,011.52 being received in fees, compared to £25,705 in 2019. However, we did qualify for a Government Business rate grant for Community Halls, administered by the district council, which provided a further £11,539. The expenditure also decreased from £19,728 to £16,037.85, but many of the costs still remained even though the hall wasn't being used, including servicing and maintenance. This meant that there was still a reduced operating surplus of £3,512.67 prior to depreciation. This would not have been the case without the government support.

It should be noted that whilst there remains a surplus of assets over liability, we need to build up reserves for any major expenditure, especially as there remains significant cracking of the walls which remain under investigation and could be expensive to fix.

Reserves Policy

It is PCC policy to try to maintain a balance on free reserves (net current assets) to smooth out fluctuations in cash flow and to meet emergencies. The balance of the free reserves at the year end was £94,380.64, which is lower than last year.

The balance of £11,332.94 in the restricted funds is principally retained towards maintaining the building and meeting the upkeep of the churchyard. In addition, there is a restricted fund, held for Great Western Park Church, which had a year-end balance of £62,027.05.

It is our policy to invest the short-term investment fund balances with the CCLA Church of England Deposit Fund.

Maintaining and developing the church building and churchyard

Churchyard

Throughout the year, a slightly smaller team of volunteers have continued to work regularly, once or twice a month, to maintain the churchyard. Covid 19 has affected our numbers, with some volunteers needing to shield to protect themselves or others, and so we were not able to tackle any bigger projects, but instead continued to do our best to keep the churchyards mown and tidy.

We continue to establish level grass over the graves, when 'man-power' is available, in order to make mowing safer and easier. Another casualty to Covid was our annual Big Tidy Up where we usually tackle the heavier things such as boundaries with a larger group of helpers.

Sadly during the course of the year we have lost several of the rowan trees in the church field due to disease, and strong winds have ultimately brought them down. We now have the opportunity to think about whether they should be replaced, and if so, with what type of tree.

The two wooden seats in the new churchyard have also succumbed to age and rot, and so we need to think about appropriate good-quality replacements. They are appreciated by visitors who come to tend graves and like to sit a'while.

In terms of other maintenance, we still have an amount of outstanding lime mortar work throughout the churchyard which has been delayed. The work is very weather dependent and requires specialist contractors.

Other projects delayed by Covid were the new cremations memorial area on the eastern side of the new churchyard, and the replacement of the church bell tower ladder. We hope to get these moving along again in 2021.

As we mentioned last year, the average age of the group is creeping evermore upwards and more younger volunteers are urgently needed to help us keep our churchyards tidy, safe and welcoming.

The possibility of the front and north churchyards being formally closed is ongoing. If they can be, then the town or district council will take over the maintenance at a basic level.

Church Path and Lighting Project

With all permissions in place and a contractor agreed, works started on site 10th February. Firstly, the uneven Yorkshire stone path leading up to the church porch was lifted and removed from site - later sold on and monies received ploughed back into the project. Some of the better stone slabs were used to form the entrance aprons under the lych gate and adjacent the porch. With better path gradients this enabled us to lay a level entrance into church so removing one of the steps up into the porch - that then delivered easier access for all. The coloured tarmac path was soon laid linking these two York stone aprons. A gravel path was then constructed to link the front of

the church around to the hall, so giving a clean sound surface under foot. Jennifer & Stuart Roberts kindly donated a tonne of fine gravel so that the existing path between the hall and churchyard could then be resurfaced.

New Lighting standards were installed in late March so that the footpath could be illuminated from the lych gate straight through to the hall. New improved lights were also fixed to the west side of the church. Final electrical connections were completed on 20th April, which included automatic summertime adjusting timeclocks. These works have vastly improved people's ease of access around the church, especially during the hours of darkness.



The reactions to the finished project have been great - easy, safe access throughout and removal of so many trip hazards. The lighting in the evenings making access feel a lot safer.

The final cost of the project was £41,850.64 but after the benefit of various grants All Saints' paid £13,793.14, making a significant long term improvement with excellent value

for money. This was only possible with the hard work of Sue Scane and Ali Goodall who secured a grant towards the project of £22,000 from FCC - they distribute landfill tax to help fund community projects. To release this grant a 11% contribution had to be paid by a third party, so I would like to thank Sue Scane and her family for this generous donation to make this project happen.

Noticeboards

After all the various planning and DAC permissions were in place, two new noticeboards were installed at All Saints' during the summer: one in the current churchyard and another on the approach to the hall. We would like to thank Julia Buckel for all her effort in sourcing and getting these two useful noticeboards into the ground. They have proved very useful in this past year with keeping people up to date with what has happened within church and all the changes that we have all had to cope with. They are also vital in displaying our various churchyard rules - these in turn help our volunteers who maintain our grounds at All Saints. In the future they will also advertise events at church and within the hall. The cost of both boards was just over £2,500.



Tree works

After a tree inspection, we have found that several trees needed professional work. A severe storm last year damaged a few trees including many of the Rowan trees lining the church field margin; unfortunately these trees were also badly infected with Ganoderma fungus which made them vulnerable to wind damage. The remaining three Rowans will be felled and we will look at replanting in the future - perhaps we could think of individually sponsoring a tree to replace those lost?

The ancient Yew, which has a Tree Preservation Order, will have some specialist work as multiple new growths on the trunk have grown then failed after strong wind have rocked their attachment points. There will be a reduction in the canopy to allow fewer but stronger branches to grow and mature.

SODC has granted planning permission for all these works to go ahead.



Bell Tower Ladder

It was highlighted that we needed to replace the bell tower ladder for Health and Safety reasons. We have had a couple of quotes for this work and a DAC faculty to proceed with the works has been applied for.

The replacement ladder will be made of aluminium and powder coated brown to match the oak beams. It will pivot at the top of the bell tower so allowing it to be pulled back in position much like a standard ladder. It will have a lower section which will slide down to anchor on the floor. There will also be a protective section so that when in the rest position against the wall it cannot be climbed. The current wooden ladder is vertical and attached to the cross beams so that you can't actually use some of the rungs as you climb up, hence the architect recommending this safety improvement for access. We look forward to seeing this being installed during 2021.

All Saints' Youth and Community Hall



Demand for Hall hire continued to be strong at the start of 2020 and many booking requests had to be refused due to the shortage of suitable booking

slots. However, the Covid-19 pandemic caused the Hall to be abruptly closed in March when national lockdown started and it remained closed until September 13th.

The second lockdown meant that the Hall had to close again on 5th November and it was still closed at the end of 2020. As the lockdown eases and the Hall fully re-opens, we hope to re-organise some regular booking times in order to allow more efficient usage of the facilities.

The PCC remains extremely thankful to the volunteers on the Hall management committee for ensuring the hall operates smoothly. Some routine maintenance and general tasks continue to be carried out, as required, by Paul Smith on an hourly rate, others are done by volunteers.

During 2020, monitoring of the wall cracks revealed seasonally cyclical movement as previously. One new thin crack appeared on the east wall at the south end.

Following advice from Price and Myers, three trial pits were dug around the North and East walls to establish the integrity of the footings. It was established that at the NE corner (where the cracking is worst) the footings were indeed faulty with the block work overhanging footings and what appeared to be some loose rubble between the bottom of the blocks and the top of the footings. Although no immediate work was necessary, Price and Myers recommended traditional underpinning for about 20m along the N and E walls. They quoted for preparing an Invitation to Tender document but are unable to provide project

management services for such a project.

In August, a wireless network link was constructed to allow Internet access from the church, which required two additional mains power sockets to be installed above the chair cupboard in the main hall. A small amount of work was carried out in the office to facilitate the wireless network connection to the church.

Finances were obviously impacted by the Covid-19 enforced closures but this was offset by a Small Business Grant of £10,000 from SODC, for which we are very grateful to the Treasurer as the application process required substantial work. Full finance details are presented separately. Nicky Tarling is still employed as the cleaner but was placed on the Government furlough scheme for the periods when the Hall was closed due to Covid-19 related restrictions.

Updating of the Terms and Conditions continued during 2020.

Helen Barrett resigned at the start of the year and Anne Phillips was employed as temporary administrator. In October, a formal recruitment process was undertaken resulting in Anne being employed permanently.

Community Outreach

Rev. Debbie Lord has started a ministry as Priest in the Community and has provided the following report on what was done in 2020.

Having followed God's call to come to Oxfordshire in August 2019, we were, at the start of 2020 beginning to find our way around our new surroundings, getting to know neighbours and church family and enjoying the experience! Throughout those early months the call to pray for Didcot and especially those yet to discover God's love for themselves took us into new and varied conversations. This adventure continued even through the subsequent unexpected global pandemic, as all of us grappled with the challenges that each lockdown brought. To say that 2020 was an unprecedented year of change is of course an understatement. But even though there was and still is much to ponder, grieve, and learn from in the sorrows of 2020, there is also reason to give thanks and remember with gladness. God is no stranger to human suffering and displacement, and as I look back through some of the activities we participated in, I see creative and warm grace notes which are signs of His presence in the life of our community.

Alongside the online Sunday services that Andy and others contributed to, Hannah, Simeon and I offered Midweek Worship; contemporary songs, prayers and a short thought for the day which were taken up by a variety of people, not all of them previously connected to any church. We were encouraged by

the number of people tuning in and also the amazing way that senior citizens- local and further afield- had risen to the challenge of learning how to use social media. Despite the limitations, these new-to-many forms of communication became a life line. And so we took these observations into our prayers, and thought about crafting new forms of worship. Thy Kingdom Come 2020, a global prayer movement was an opportunity we responded to, and our two online sessions featured readings, songs, and reflection around the thought that we as believers are called to pray for others to discover the Christian faith. It was heartening that so many church members joined in; our prayer life was strengthened.

Around this time, as a family we were getting to know our neighbours better through distanced conversations after the weekly NHS clap, and social media chats. It was an absolute treat to share musical moments from our driveway as the nation recalled VE Day, and wave at our neighbours as we enjoyed cream teas in our own safe spaces. We were becoming aware of each other's hobbies and interests, and it was obvious that people were really glad of the contact, even though it had to be at a distance. It made me aware that one of the big challenges in the pandemic was that there was nothing to look forward to for so many people. It was impossible to predict when life might 'return to its previous reality'. And with this thought and the growing sense that sharing creative gifts could help to bring fresh purpose, deeper relationships and hope, I spent time thinking about Harvest and ways to include and encourage a different kind of celebration.

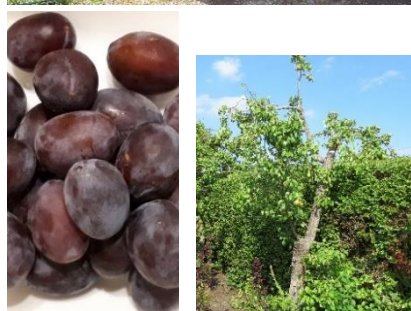


During July and August we started to prepare for an online community Harvest Festival. We called it 'Didcot Harvest Past and Present' and with the help of many people arranged for special zoom events on 25th and 27th September. Our wonderful guest presenters, Stewart and Carol Henderson, offered us encouragement, humour and literary input along the way, and we began filming conversations with church members and local farmers about their harvest memories and current harvest activities. These conversations were incredibly informative, and Hannah, Simeon and I really enjoyed the learning curve of filming; there was such warmth and welcome! Thank you to everyone who contributed. As relative newbies to Didcot we were learning about its history and geography, the challenges and richness of rural life past and present. It was also interesting that many people who have lived here for decades said that they discovered things from our subsequent presentations that they did not know! With regards to mission, this was a listening phase, and it has fed into our understanding of what makes

Didcot the evolving place that it is. It is also the case that our participants showed courage and a willingness to do something new, and for that we give thanks. Following the call of God to bless our neighbourhoods does involve stepping out of our comfort zones, and all of us have a part to play!

Into the mix of interviews, poems and history came some wonderful creative offerings: a huge collection of photos which people shared of their lockdown adventures growing plants veg and fruit; a 'guess the weight of the lardy cake' competition; potato juggling challenge (enjoyed by children and adults alike I recall!); a 'make an NHS Rainbow from fruit veg and flowers' photo opportunity; lively jazz from Simeon; specially recorded music from the choir; photos from Wantage Mill (one of the oldest left in the country) and interviews with Richard Kennell from SOFEA and Andrew Snell at Didcot Food Bank to bring the harvest provision stories bang up to date. Our online events would not have been possible without the care and computer expertise that Andy and Hannah contributed; editing film clips, sticking things together online and masterminding these events was an epic task. But it was such a worthwhile venture, and so many people who joined in were so glad to have been part of it. Our Friday night session showcased the many creative gifts in our community, and on the Sunday session we reflected on the story of Ruth, an Old Testament refugee who discovered the goodness of God during the barley harvest in Bethlehem. It seemed fitting as barley harvests in OX11 are a significant happening, and our prayer is that over time more people

will come to discover the goodness of God in a personal way, just as Ruth did all those centuries ago.



The next step after this was crafting for an online Advent Calendar of Light. We had realised that sharing photos was something our wider community likes to do, and the idea was to provide something reflective that people could use in the run up to what was going to be a very different sort of Christmas. Our launch event on Advent Sunday with the Hendersons as guest presenters again included Carol's wonderful poem 'Unimaginable Light', a conversation about her iconography, and Stewart's poem 'Christmas Magnificat'. Our Calendar was updated daily on YouTube and had a photo, specially recorded music and a thought for the day. So many people sent us pictures on the theme of light that it was

a challenge to choose from them, but the calendar featured pictures from near and far! We are hugely grateful to Mike Kendrick and team at Wild Shots Outreach, based in Kruger National Park S.A. who sent absolutely stunning photos taken by African teenagers. If you want to know more about their vital conservation work please follow the link-

<https://www.wildshotsoutreach.org/>



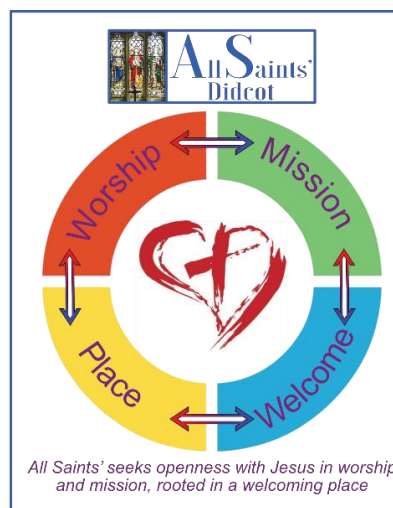
And behind all these activities was prayer. Grateful thanks must go to the small group of people who committed to pray for all these activities, asking that God would bring hope and light to many homes. We finished 2020 with joyful distanced filming of Harry and Freddie talking about their Christmas hopes, and their understanding of who baby Jesus is. Another reminder that we all have a part to play in sharing the Good News in our communities-however young or old we are! For that is the best news of all; *God moved into the neighbourhood, became one of us so that we might know his friendship and goodness in life's adventures.*

We have continued to reach out especially to families with children at

home since then, and are excited about the opportunities ahead.

Vicar's Report

At the start of 2020, I had been at All Saints' for four months and we were reviewing our life and mission together, which was helping me settle and understand what everyone valued about All Saints'. This was interrupted rather suddenly by the pandemic that changed everything whilst also perhaps highlighting more clearly what we wanted to hold onto together. I came back to reflect on all that had been shared in November and came up with the following diagram:



We value All Saints' as a place of welcome, seeking to develop worship for the regulars and mission in the community. The side chapel window of Mary and Martha continues to speak to me of our desire to keep together the closeness to Jesus in prayer and worship with the active mission in our local (and wider) community, seeking to serve and witness in Didcot and beyond. We have collected a great list of the community groups that we are each involved in and put together a cycle of prayer that embraces these alongside our mission charities, community concerns and individual

needs. At the heart of our life is the love of God seen in Christ.

During the pandemic we have continued these same themes, if in different ways. Our worship moved online and become more varied. We have had challenges with streaming from church but great work has been done on this by a number of people; the virtual choir has kept us in touch with familiar voices lifted up in worship – thanks to Paul for a huge amount of work on this; Quiet Space has provided monthly reflections at home – thanks to Peter & Lottie; the Healing Group with monthly prayer themes via email – thanks to Stuart & Jennifer; and we have tried shorter YouTube worship from home – with thanks to Debbie, Simeon & Hannah. In the early months, I provided reflections each week to help us think and pray through the challenges, which have now transformed into a monthly ministers letter. We have settled into a routine of weekly Facebook live services and tried Zoom services around Easter, Ascension and Thy Kingdom Come. Plenty of learning going on! Our faith has often been stretched but this is so often the invitation to growth. We are encouraged to be honest about what we have lost and found so difficult and to see the God who is found in the wounded Christ who embraces us.

Mission in the community has become more challenging with the distancing and lockdowns, although phone calls, Zoom and help with food and transport have made such a difference for people. With the significant challenges families have faced, we have tried a mix of online specials around the festivals with activity bags distributed to a

growing number of children, many of whom have not been regular at All Saints' (with thanks to all involved in this). Who knows where this will lead! We did some brilliant Harvest online specials that drew on the wisdom of many at All Saints' as well as those in the farming community and local food charities.



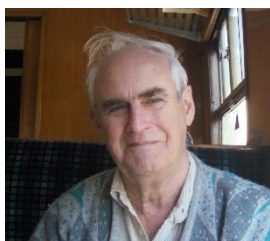
Although we have not been able to welcome people into our church building, we continue to welcome people virtually and have seen a number of people become regular at All Saints' over Facebook who were not before. Our weekly Zoom chats have been invaluable in sustaining the lives of those of us involved, providing a place of care and prayer. All those people who phone round regularly have been doing an invaluable ministry that has helped sustain us.

Thank you so much to our Church Wardens, Brenda & Alastair, who have been an active tower of strength over the year. All the cleaning, organising, WiFi fixing, building care, wisdom, support and so much more have been much appreciated. Thanks also to everyone on the PCC as we have mined the depths of detail in Government guidelines to try and make sense of the next steps! Thanks to Sue as Treasurer, who has been a wise guide through a time when our income has gone down significantly and we are reliant on our reserves (a hint to review your giving!). We have all appreciated the time put in by the choir, by those who have learned how to record

themselves reading & interceding, and those who have kept the churchyard in such good repair. Thanks also to Anne in the office – she stepped up after Helen left as our Administrator into what has been a challenging year and has done so well! She has enabled us to open the Youth & Community Hall when guidelines have allowed, alongside the grants that Sue Scane has been able to obtain to maintain this vital community building. Personally, I have also benefitted from the support of Josie, Mark, Hugh, Tim, Nick, and of course Debbie(!), as our local ministers who have given above and beyond through the year.

Some of our plans have been inevitably on hold in regard to our buildings and churchyard but we have begun the process of closing the old parts of the churchyard (in front of and behind the building) which were full in the 1960s. This does not prevent burials in existing graves but the maintenance will transfer to the Town Council.

We do continue to give thanks for those who have left this life in the secure hope of resurrection life with Christ. This last year, amongst others, we remember Philip Shipman who served All Saints' and GWP in many ways over the years.



I have been pondering what we have been learning over this very unusual year. In many ways we have simply kept going, sought to keep sustaining ourselves in worship and caring for those around us. The months have

rushed by, from lockdown to lockdown, from hot sunshine to dull winter months. Through this we have been forcibly reminded that the Christian faith is lived out primarily in the places we live and amongst the people we meet (our 'frontline'). The church, as a gathering of Christians, exists to resource and nourish this kind of practical and outward looking faith. All Saints' has sought in different ways to resource our Christian lives with God.

We need resources for prayer and worship that are not limited to the building, but help us at home, with our families, in the challenging places. How might we continue and extend our online offerings and activity bags?

We need ways of supporting life in Christian community even when our community is distanced due to pandemic or the more general health and practical realities. How can we deepen our sense of community together?

We need to sustain lives that act for the good of others and resist the constant temptation to withdraw. How can we reach out in mission when our resources are limited?

These are questions that might guide us as we gently ease out of the restrictions. A common theme in a number of discussions in recent weeks has been that of prayer. The need to encourage one another in our lives of prayer, to deepen our experience of God, to know Jesus close by, to seek the provision of the Holy Spirit. I am so thankful for the Lord's provision over this last year, a year which was not what we expected when we arrived in Didcot! It has been great to get to know

you better and we much appreciate your kindness to our family.

This coming year we look forward to Sasha joining us as curate, with Matt, and we pray for grace, wisdom, steadfastness and hope as we walk together with Jesus.

Structure, Governance and Management

The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC is a Registered Charity.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. At All Saints', the membership of the PCC consists of the incumbent, licensed lay ministers, churchwardens, representatives on Deanery Synod and members elected by those members of the congregation who are on the Electoral Roll of the church. All those who attend our services / members of the congregation are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent. New members receive initial training into the workings of the PCC.

Given its wide responsibilities, the PCC has a number of sub-committees each dealing with a particular aspect of parish life. These committees, which include worship and faith development, mission and outreach, fundraising, building development and the Youth and Community Hall management committee, are all responsible to the PCC and report back to it. Apart from the Standing Committee, which is the

only committee required by law and has power to transact the business of the PCC between its meetings as directed by the PCC, the sub-committees are advisory and do not have executive powers.

The PCC met for six scheduled meetings through the year. After the introduction of lockdown restrictions from March, most of these were held over Zoom. The PCC also met for a number of shorter *ad-hoc* meetings mostly in order to approve risk assessments for use of the church and the hall.

Annual Parochial Church Meetings are normally held just before or just after Easter. However, the Diocese permitted much-needed flexibility by extending the deadline for holding APCMs. All Saints' held its 2020 APCM on 11th October.

The Ladygrove Church

The Ladygrove Church, which is an Anglican/Baptist Local Ecumenical Partnership, is a parish in its own right. It is still, however, a part of the All Saints' benefice.

Deanery Synod

The deanery synod provides PCCs with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the church. The Revd David Rice is the Area Dean for the Wallingford Deanery, which includes Didcot (St Peter's, All Saints', Great Western Park and Ladygrove), Harwell, Chilton, Cholsey, Moulsoford, Hagbourne, Blewbury, Upton, South & North Moreton, Aston Tirrold & Aston Upthorpe, Wallingford, Crowmarsh Gifford & Brightwell-cum-Sotwell.

Meetings of the deanery synod in 2020 were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, only two deanery synod meetings were held and four meetings of the deanery synod standing committee.

The main focus of the year was to progress the mission action plan (MAP). This was an important piece of work, designed to support the mission of individual parishes and guide the life of our synod. The MAP is designed to help the deanery to focus on the issues considered important at PCC level in order to reflect these up to the diocese, providing vital input into Bishop Steven's Common Vision. The MAP was presented to the Dorchester Mission and Pastoral Committee in October 2020 and was well received.

Our MAP has four key focus areas:

- 1. Development of ministry to children, young people & families**
- 2. Developing our outreach to new & settled communities**
- 3. Development of appropriate patterns of worship**
- 4. Development of the Ministry in the Greater Didcot Garden Town area, both financially and structurally,**

One initiative emerging from the MAP was the creation of a programme of Pilgrim Path walks across the deanery, to link parishes and benefices. Four walks were planned as part of this programme, these being Blewbury, Wallingford, the Astons and Didcot/Hagbourne. Each pilgrimage was planned to start and end with prayers and refreshments would be

included. Unfortunately, this programme was brought to an abrupt halt by the pandemic and will be rescheduled at a later date.

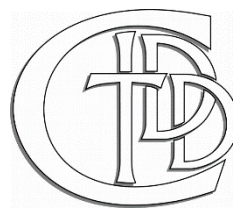
Another initiative to emerge was the Youth Initiative, working to develop a standalone Youth Trust to better equip secondary age youths; this involves churches in the Greater Didcot area and ecumenical partners.

At the meeting on the 11th of March 2020, Rachel Brockie spoke about the work of The Children's Society and how some children today live through some awful experiences. The Children's Society help by campaigning for law changes to make life safer for children at risk, helping children to access the mental health support they need, striving to stamp out the trafficking of young people and criminal exploitation etc.

The meeting on the 24th of November 2020 focused on developing the church online, acknowledging that most churches had introduced an online service facility at some point since the start of the pandemic. The guest speaker was Revd Matt Hogg from St Alban's, Fulham who spoke about online church, particularly social media, and how that can be used to connect with people, including those who attend church physically.

Finally, the Parish Share for 2021 was negotiated; this highlighted that some parishes would not be able to meet their parish share in 2021 and that others would struggle. For some parishes this is an ongoing problem, for others it is a direct result of the pandemic.

Ecumenical relationships



The church is a member of Churches Together in Didcot and District (CTDD).

A Women's World Day of Prayer service was organised in March. Plans were also drawn up for an Ecumenical Lent Study Group but that had to be cancelled.

Options were investigated for Good Friday, and Contact details for all Churches circulated for Easter.

Information was circulated to Church leaders on Services During Coronavirus.

We have not been able to have meetings of the enabling group (committee) or an AGM, due to the Coronavirus, but the offices have continued.

Andrew Jones continues as Convenor (chair).

The Didcot and District Christian Aid Committee, D & D Christian Aid, was not able to organise anything for Christian Aid Week, but information was circulated.

A Coronavirus-secure version of the Christian Aid Sponsored Walk took place in October, on the Downs, and that raised £1,118, with £430 from All Saints and £372.50 from Great Western Park. The Chilton Plant Sale raised £595.

Safeguarding

We seek to be a church that provides a safe and secure environment for the

most vulnerable in our church and in the wider community and, therefore, place major importance on the implementation of all safeguarding policies to enable this. We are working towards a vision where every member of the church sees themselves as a part of providing this environment for the most vulnerable.

[DBS \(Disclosure and Barring Service\)](#)

During the year, a number of additional people received DBS clearance for work with children, young people and vulnerable adults. The clearance provider for the Diocese is Access Personal Checking Services Ltd. as recommended by the Church of England. We are very grateful for the work that Tim Scane has carried out as verifier (viewing applicants' documents to confirm their identity) and keeping track of when people are due for renewal.

[Safeguarding Policies and Training](#)

The recommendations in the Safeguarding Policy are adhered to in all activities relating to safeguarding and recruitment. The PCC has an ongoing Promoting a Safer Church Action Plan which is reviewed annually, although the pandemic reduced our usual activities.

A copy of the Safeguarding Handbook is available in the Vicar's vestry and online. We follow its procedures for dealing with any safeguarding concern or allegation. We recognise the importance of being sensitive to any issues that may be raised and responding appropriately.

Training has continued on-line for those in the relevant roles. Eleanor Hards,

the safeguarding officer, has completed all the required training.

The Church of England from time to time also provides Safeguarding learning reviews arising from serious situations elsewhere.

[Safeguarding issues](#)

There were no major pastoral situations during 2020 which raised safeguarding issues.

During the year, the major safeguarding issue was the Covid-19 pandemic. National and Church of England guidance was followed at all times, with frequent updating, in relation to both the Church premises and the Youth and Community Hall.

[Health and Safety](#)

David Ralston has taken over responsibility for health and safety; many thanks to Peter Baker for all that he has contributed over the years.

Covid-19 has created challenges to both the church and the hall. One positive outcome of the pandemic is the reduction in risk owing to fewer people being in or around the premises. No accidents were recorded during the year and no Test and Trace contact notifications were linked to either the church or the hall. There is an expectation that further challenges will arise as the lockdown restrictions are lifted.

A lot of effort was put into production of coronavirus risk assessments for both the church and hall. In all cases, these were produced in the light of both government and Church of England guidance.

A big thank you to David for drafting the assessments and to PCC members for making time for online meetings to approve them.

We continue to look at issues around accessing the bell tower and other areas presenting fall-from-height hazards such as using the staircase giving access to the old Rood Loft.

Administrative information

All Saints' Church is situated in Lydalls Road, Didcot. It is part of the Dorchester Episcopal Area in the Diocese of Oxford within the Church of England. The correspondence address for the church is: The Administrator, All Saints' Youth and Community Hall, Roman Place, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 7ER.

The website address is:

www.didcotallsaints.org.uk



The Didcot All Saints' Church Community Page can be found on Facebook.

PCC members who have served at any time during 2020 are:

Ex-Officio members:

Incumbent: The Revd. Dr Andy Lord
Associate Minister, GWP Church:

The Revd. Mark Bodeker

Wardens: Mr Alastair Adams
Miss Brenda Andrews

Licensed Lay Ministers:

Dr Nick Hards

Dr Tim Scane

Deanery Synod Representatives:

Mrs. Alison Adams

Mrs Eleanor Hards (until October)

Mr. Andrew Jones (until October)

Elected members:

Mrs Julia Buckel (until October)

Mrs Clare Hamer

Mrs Eleanor Hards (from October)

Miss Anne Phillips

Mr David Ralston (from October)

Mrs Sue Scane (until October, co-opted November, Treasurer)

Dr Peter Sumner (Secretary)

Signed:

.....
Revd. Dr Andy Lord

Date:

.....



Great Western Park Church annual review 2020



Summary

As I write this update to the previous report prepared in October 2020, quite a lot has changed. We are planning to begin worshipping together (23rd May – Pentecost) and to do this in a new building, the GWP District Centre. Lifting of restrictions is also enabling us to plan for the reopening of our Community Café and to begin to welcome back families, who we have sadly missed during this pandemic. Meeting together virtually has ensured that the life of the church has continued, but not everyone has been able to engage with this. Like many other Churches and charity based groups, children (their parents) and those unable to manage Zoom or the internet generally have found this medium difficult (and tiring). It is one of our priorities that we reengage with these groups immediately we begin to gather again. As such, intergenerational services and a return to Morning Prayer and services of Holy Communion at Williams Place will be our primary focus.

Up until now, our 'live', interactive services have continued each week with a blend of contemporary worship and praise. We have focussed our bible teaching and sermons on the experience of new church congregations in the New Testament, forming in Jerusalem and in Philippi. More recently we have been looking at unanswered prayer and when God seems silent or absent. This has linked in with Life Group meetings where we have been working our way through Pete Grieg's Prayer course(s). Our services have catered for all-ages, although we recognise the difficulty for children and young people to concentrate on a live-streamed service delivered on a small screen. That said, we have enjoyed the

interactive activities which have taught bible stories and bible themes in simple, yet effective ways. We have also maintained two separate congregations with the main Sunday congregation adopting technology to meet, while those at Williams Place sharing a weekly reflection service which has been faithfully printed and distributed by staff to around a dozen residents who have worshipped from the safety of their own apartment. We have continued to offer regular reflections to our church community via a weekly Newsletter, with contributions from several of our congregation. We also meet each week for coffee and chat as part of our virtual Community Café, and have introduced a Church Quiz, recognising the importance of meeting socially. Life Groups have also continued to meet, with two new groups added, maintaining the structure and support for members both practically and spiritually.

Indeed, I am amazed and hugely encouraged by the amount of work done by so many to keep things together and to continue to offer the love of God to both our church congregation and community. In many ways it is a testament to the 'pioneering' spirit of our church and its deepening roots that we remain 'open'. It is also exciting that we are turning our efforts to opportunities for post Lockdown 'replanting' and 'flourishing'. Thank you to all of you for your faithfulness in these extraordinary times.

Establishing Traditions

One of the wonderful advantages of a relatively new church is that you can try new things. We wanted to offer a Christian community event at Christmas that focussed on 'gift' – Jesus born as a human, given without cost, offering hope and joy. Our first Carol Service on December 7th, 2019 included readings and carols and a wonderful performance by Stephen Freeman School Choir who sang to us. It was full to bursting (refer to picture below) and we were able to witness boldly, telling the story of Jesus' birth, explaining that this remained relevant to everyone. Sadly, this could not be repeated in 2020 but we will retain this as a key event in our church and community calendar going forward.



Maintaining existing ones (Traditions)

Activities Week in GWP was again popular with c 1,500 people engaging in a week of activities in July 2019, designed for children and families. At the end of the week, we invited the entire community for an evening BBQ with live music and entertainment.



Maintaining this intensity in terms of organising and running events, with a relatively small number of willing volunteers, and committing sufficient funds to ensure virtually free access to all, is demanding. Reflecting also on how we might add a more Christian focus to future events and to encourage new people to engage with GWP Church, we had planned to join with Boundary Park Sports Association to 'take over' the Sunday of their 'Bands on the Boundary' weekend event in June called 'Beyond the Boundary'. It will be like a large, traditional Church fete and another wonderful opportunity to the community together to 'reunite'. We are planning an open-air service to begin the day and then, combine interactive activities and games that would engage the whole community. BP Sports Assn. offered their facilities and infrastructure without charge. With all restrictions planned to be lifted on June 21st we hope that we will be able to go ahead with this and enjoy the day with the entire GWP community.



Progress and Challenges

GWP Church was designated a Conventional District on 20th November 2020. This triggered the transfer of those within the Leadership team onto a newly formed PCC, with an update of the Electoral Roll, election of Church Wardens – Kath Butler and Ryan Williams, along with the appointment of Deanery synod Reps. - David and Sue Hawkins. A PCC Secretary will be appointed this coming APCM on June 13th. Much of our recent focus as a PCC has therefore been to develop new structures which underpin the operations and life of the church. This has involved creating a number of sub-groups, designating leaders for each and appointing and co-opting members of the PCC or congregation to provide oversight. Subgroups include.

Children and Families
Communications
Finance and Property
Mission and Outreach
Pastoral care
Worship

These subgroups meet regularly and present to the PCC recommendations for approval. This means for a more efficient and timelier PCC with matters for decision or agreement set out by way of note for consideration beforehand.

Although remaining part of the Benefice of All Saints', and maintaining existing parish boundaries (for which the outline of GWP sits in 4 separate parishes), the establishment of a Conventional District means independence in terms of spiritual direction and early steps to becoming a separate parish. With this comes the requirement to pay Parish Share, a timetable for increasing Share set, and which the first payment is due in 2022.

I am acutely aware that this extra work is mainly placed on those whose lives are already terribly busy. We must not overburden our most committed individuals and to recognise that we cannot do everything (right now!). More and more, we must recognise the importance of accepting God's hand and leading in all of this and that it is He who sustains us. We are required just to be faithful.

The core focus of the Church – Mission



At the heart of what we do (our DNA), is mission. One of the challenges with Lockdown has been those whose faith is new, or who are on the edge of joining, and have tended to drift away when we stopped meeting together physically. It has been hard to retain them week after week on Zoom. We are now in a new phase of rebuilding. We are also blessed to have a core of dedicated congregation who have stuck at it. Our service recordings and weekly reflections sent to the entire community have also been greatly appreciated.

Challenging those who do come has continued during our services, where we focus on an application to faith which is incarnational. We have done a number of service series focussing on the new church emerging in Acts, and then for those churches in the New Testament who are establishing themselves, such as Philippians, the lessons Paul offers in terms of relying on power of the Holy Spirit, acting in unity and keeping faithful.

This discussion and challenge have continued within our Life Groups where relationship is developed, and faith strengthened.

We recognise important life events of marriage and baptisms, joining together with families to bless and to encourage. Up until lock-down there were a good number of these. We also, sadly, marked the end of life, saying goodbye to our oldest member of our congregation, Philip Shipman. He was a great supporter of our church and faithfully joined us each Sunday even as his health diminished. The Covid pandemic robbed many of the chance to attend his funeral, however we will celebrate his life and contribution to ours by way of a memorial gathering later this year.

Given the congregation dynamics, many of those who come have young families. We continued to engage with families, as best we could during lockdown, and in the absence of Claire Wren, our Children and Families worker who is currently on maternity leave, we introduced Blankety Church, where families could meet together (socially distanced) to worship simply around a Christian theme.

What might be the next steps?

Getting into a building to begin worshipping again has been a crucial first step. We are not quite there yet but will 'rejoice' when we finally get to be together in our new home in the centre of GWP, the District Centre. Again, as I write this, there is still a huge amount to do, but with the right engagement from the District Council all the ingredients are there for it to be our long-term base both for services and outreach into the community. There we plan to begin 'replanting' after a period of 'pruning' (I appreciate that I am mixing metaphors here!), advertising the church to the entire community and welcoming everyone back.

Working in the Community

After six years working as founding Governor and latterly Chair of Governors at UTC Oxfordshire, I decided to step down. This was in June (2020) and seemed the right time, coinciding with the first appointed Head teacher leaving in April and the appointment of a capable replacement. I will still maintain some connection with regular visits and assemblies but will use the additional time now available for rest and prayer.

Recent conversations with the Head suggest that the UTC will be open for inviting groups back to use the building from September. This would include GWP Church if required.

I continue to work as Trustee of the GWP Boundary Park Sports Assn. and offer time within local primary schools with visiting and assemblies.

Those who make our Church thrive.

I am incredibly grateful for so many who work so hard to underpin all the work that goes on in our Church and beyond it into the community. I sense that this is not a chore, or something done out of duty, but rather an offering of ourselves because we believe doing God's work is transformative both to individuals and communities. Many who come to our gatherings talk of the atmosphere of welcome and hospitality. This is something we offer naturally. But it needs saying, that all this would not be possible without the unconditional effort of so many. So, thank you.

The way ahead

The passage in Acts 16 where Paul and Silas find themselves locked away in prison is one of those which we remember as having a happy ending. We celebrate with both men, God answering their prayers, the earthquake and the conversion of the entire jailer's family. A mighty story of transformation and change.

But I sometimes wonder whether we miss some of the teaching in this story in the way it unfolds. Paul and Silas are being faithful and proclaiming God's mercy and grace, railing against the inequalities taking place in a place of prayer. Their orders to free a slave girl with a spirit of divination went against the interests of her owners, who stood to lose a great deal of money if this girl was healed. So, her owners accuse Paul and Silas and have them beaten and thrown into jail. Even though the story, set out in Acts, is described in few words, we realise that those who oppose these men are serious and will do whatever it takes to get things back to normal. So, Paul and Silas suffer a mock trial, are stripped, beaten with rods and then receive a severe flogging.

For those of us wanting to image the whole story, this prelude, which gets us to the point of release and conversion must have been dramatic and frightening for the two accused. Of course, this makes the miracle of the earthquake and being set free, whilst they languish in jail, even more dramatic. But what would have it been like for Paul and Silas as they waited for their fate to be determined?

We have not been in anything like similar circumstances as we have worked our way through this pandemic. But to simply jump to a 'normal' situation, the good ending, would be to ignore what we have all gone through getting to this point. It has been difficult. Most of us have suffered loss. To put it another way, we lose so much if we simply focus on the good bits, of reunion and the joy of having a hug.

We want all these people to return but are not sure that they will or how to go about reengaging with them again. This prolonged period of absence has meant for many of us a loss of contact with those we feel most comfortable with – those in our church family. So, what will it be like to meet up again? Will they remember me and to what extent should I hope that our relationships can go back to something like there were?

In our often busy and stressful lives there seems merit in offering to God our biggest fears, knowing that we do not have the answers, that it is only in the silence where we are really able to hear God speaking to us.

Mark Bodeker – May 2021 (updated)

2020

Annual Report of the PCC



**Didcot
All Saints'
Church**

Introduction

Open to God

Open to Everyone

Open to Change

This report provides a reflection of the life at All Saints' and outlines the wonderful activities that all its members undertake in order to sustain our life of faith, prayer and fellowship. We extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who makes All Saints' a warm and welcoming community.

All Saints' Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility for working with the incumbent, Revd Dr Andy Lord, in promoting the whole mission of the church: pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. The PCC also has responsibility for maintaining the church of Didcot All Saints', the churchyard and the Youth and Community Hall.

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 All Saints'. The PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the parish and, through our Mission Action Plan, aims to witness to the love of God within the local community and the wider world. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament.

When planning our activities for the year, we have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. In

particular, we try to enable everyone to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the gospel and encountering God.
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Missionary and outreach work.

We have drawn inspiration from the window of Martha and Mary, who illustrate the need for us to pause in prayer to enable action in the world. All Saints' seeks openness with Jesus in worship and mission, rooted in a welcoming place.

This last year has been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic which has affected every area of church life. This rhythm of prayer/worship and mission/action has sustained us and enabled us to keep serving others. Our buildings have been less accessible in person, although more accessible online. They remain places of welcome that draw us to God.

All Saints' has been responsible for the legal overview of Great Western Park Church, which is designated as a Fresh Expression of Church. An annual report for the Great Western Park Church is given as an appendix to this report. The church became a Conventional District in January 2021.

Volunteers

We would like to thank all the volunteers who work so hard to ensure the smooth running of our church – its services, community outreach, the building itself, the hall and the churchyard.



In particular we would like to mention our churchwardens, Alastair Adams and Brenda Andrews, who have helped steer us through this pandemic year, providing wisdom and much practical help.

Achievements and Performance

Throughout 2020, the church community continued to build on the vision set out in the Mission Action Plan, reflected in our PCC subgroups. The four areas of focus are:

- Worship, prayer and faith development
- Mission and outreach
- Sustaining the work of the church
- Maintenance and development of the church buildings and environment

Worship, prayer and faith development

The coronavirus pandemic has affected the number of services we have been able to hold in the church building. We celebrated three baptisms and one wedding this year. In addition, we provided 15 funeral services of which only four were held in church with others taking place at other premises such as a crematorium.

The updated Electoral Roll, as presented to the 2020 APCM contained 70 members.

Music

2020 was a very challenging year for all of us, and not least musically.

Our normal pattern of rehearsals and services went out of the window overnight, but we are extremely proud of what we have managed to achieve despite the challenges of working remotely. The commitment of those able to contribute to the digitally based 'virtual choir' recordings has been admirable, amounting to countless hours of work from all concerned.

Since we moved to virtual singing, we have put together 108 hymns for the streamed services (plus the Eucharist setting, and Benedictus), generating in the process almost 100GB of data

The choir is greatly looking forward to being able to make music live again (once that is both permitted and safe), when the sound of voices singing together in worship will return in our building.

We are extremely grateful to Paul Hedley, our Director of Music, for all he has done in leading the virtual choir and in helping with relaying services from the church.

Prayer

Lottie and Peter Sumner continue to lead Quiet Space, giving an opportunity to a small group of people drawn from a number of churches in the town to gather for contemplative prayer. As with other church activities, the group needed to adapt to lockdown restrictions, with e-mailed reflections replacing meetings in the church building.

Over the past year the Healing Group, which is co-ordinated by Stuart Roberts, has kept in touch by e-mail to share requests for prayer and for monthly up-dates.

We would like to thank all who are involved with the Healing Group who have continued to keep in touch by phone and e-mail with those who need our support, either directly or through family and friends.

Hopefully, the group will soon be able to meet together again.

Faith development

A number of small groups began a Lent course using the *Helpful Habits* material for developing personal prayer. However, this was brought to an abrupt halt when the first lockdown came into effect in March.

Fellowship groups

The Monday Night fellowship group started the year by continuing to consider C S Lewis. In February, the

group met for a fellowship meal at the Boar's Head. Unfortunately, the group has not been able to meet since the lockdown restrictions came into effect in March.

Sadly, the Natter Knitters weren't able to meet at all in 2020. They are really looking forward to meeting again and are hoping to celebrate the occasion with a lunch.

Young at Heart managed one meeting – an enjoyable Coffee and Cake in Jean Holderness' garden – before having to stop their usual get togethers. However, the group have been able to keep in touch by telephone throughout the various lockdowns.

Sunday School

Sunday school started the year, as usual, following the lectionary set for the year, but our sessions were cut short by the advent of the Coronavirus epidemic, in March. We enjoyed 'Christingle at Candlemas' in January and Elizabeth's baptism in February. Unfortunately, due to the Coronavirus lockdowns, we were unable to conduct any further Sunday School sessions for the remainder of the year. However, we are planning to resume our activities from September 2021.

Mission and outreach

In the light of the financial position of the church, the PCC reluctantly took the decision to reduce the amount of money given to missions and charities from 10% to 5% of its income. This led the Mission and Outreach Sub-committee to re-focus its strategy. The PCC has made a commitment to continue financial support to the TRAIN youth work project, which left only a small sum available for supporting other projects.

In response to the reduced budget, the sub-committee made a commitment to giving of time, talents and prayer for the organisations that All Saints' has traditionally supported.

The congregation was asked to provide information on the organisations that they are members of. This allowed a booklet to be produced that demonstrates the congregation is not just people who attend church services on a Sunday but are active within the community throughout the week. The various organisations are also highlighted in the prayer page of the news sheet.

Some of the initiatives arising from the sub-committee have led to increasing links with local families. These are discussed in detail in the section on community outreach given later in this report.

At the start of the year, Noreen Kennedy stood down from the sub-committee after many years of support. We are very thankful for all that Noreen has contributed.

The sub-committee has exciting plans for the future. If you would like to be involved in developing these plans you would be very welcome to join the sub-committee.

Schools

Having run school assemblies at both Manor and Stephen Freeman Schools at the start of the year, these came to an abrupt halt in March 2020: we are anticipating resuming these from September (2021).

Our relationship with Manor School has resumed, following the enforced quiet spell.

We supported a Prayer Space at Stephen Freeman School in February. Currently, we are in discussion regarding a potential Prayer Space at Manor School in the Autumn (of 2021). We also hope to host a Carol Service at All Saints Church, in December.

Bell Ringing

With three ringers (Bertie Doy, Andrew Jones and Peter Jones), we started the year ringing on most Sunday mornings and holding practices on Monday evenings as people's availability allowed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic no ringing took place from late March, with one exception – Andrew and Peter Jones (as members of the same household) recorded some ringing on two bells for use in the Christmas morning service.

23rd Didcot Scout Group

Unfortunately, we have no report on the scout group this year.

Didcot Garden Town

The Didcot Garden Town project has continued through 2020 and has highlighted a number of the larger projects such as the new road infrastructure money that has been obtained, business and research park developments, the Gateway project and improvements to the cycle network. A number of areas of Didcot are marked for more housing development with over 10,000 new homes either approved or under construction. The development on Valley Park, between Great Western Park and the A34, is delayed but there are still plenty of other houses being built!

There is a new advisory board for the Garden Town within the district councils and we have been encouraged to join Sounding Boards. Andy Lord, the Bishop's Advisor for Didcot Garden Town, attended the first of these and contributed some thoughts on how we need to link the big projects with local community activities. Ali Adams has been involved facilitating a number of conversations across the community. It has been good to hear about local concerns for the environment and more sustainable networks of travel.

The churches' response to the housing developments over 2020 have focused, at All Saints', on the appointment of Sasha Braun as curate to start in July 2021. She will be based at All Saints' but have time allocated to reaching out with others in new areas. The Laing's charity have very generously offered to provide housing for the long term that will enable us to be alongside others in developing community generally and in drawing people together in faith. It is

great to have a personal involvement in these new areas. Ladygrove Church are reaching out to those moving into the new housing on the north edge of the estate. Great Western Park Church continue to engage with the council on the community buildings (with joys & frustrations!). Jonathan Mobey, Rector in Harwell & Chilton, has established a new Youth & Children's Work trust that draws together a number of churches from across Greater Didcot. This is seeking funding from the Diocese with the aim of nurturing our young people in faith and enabling them to reach out with the good news of Jesus.

Within the Anglican church, we have established a Great Didcot Group chaired by David Tyler, Assistant Archdeacon. This comprises the incumbents and meets every few months to focus on our joint mission across the growing Didcot area. It gives chance for us to share and learn together as we step out in faith. Reflections on the area continue to be a theme in the Deanery plan and work on this will be needed in the coming months. There is an awareness that the reduced income in many churches will bring challenges to maintaining the ministry and mission we would like.

Many agencies and charities have responded to the pandemic with great sacrifice and creativity and it was good to highlight the work of SOFEA and Didcot Food Bank in the All Saints' Harvest special online events. Interviews brought some of their work alive to us and we are encouraged to support them. We are also aware of the development of Didcot Community Partnership seeking to address many of the family issues raised before and

during the pandemic. It has been harder to build on some of the relationships with these agencies over this last year, when we have been unable to meet in person, and the demands on their time have soared. Yet we continue to seek creative ways forward together.

Sustaining the work of All Saints'

All Saints' Church

Total receipts on unrestricted funds were £54,019.68 of which £39,247.47 was unrestricted planned voluntary donations, and a further £8,493.96 was from Gift Aid. There was a deficit for the year of £17,640.60 before the transfer of £10,000 to the Building Fund, making a total deficit of £27,640.60. This was a further significant increase in the deficit from last year, which was £21,834.76.

The planned giving through the Parish Giving Scheme, Envelopes and banker's orders decreased again by 4.43% on top of the 3.7% decrease last year. Total income was down by 14.5% on top of the 7.63% compared with last year. This was partly due to the impact of COVID from March, which curtailed general collections, weddings and fundraising.

£71,660.28 was spent from unrestricted funds to provide the Christian ministry from All Saints' Church. This was a 4.53% decrease on 2019, which had increased 4.5% on the previous year. Much of this increase was due to the contribution to the diocesan parish share, which increased by 4.6% in the year. Maintenance and Running costs, which had been rising in previous years, were very similar to last year.

During the year, the total fund balances decreased from £139,353.81 to £105,713.58 of which £94,380.64 is unrestricted.

The Independent Examiner is Haines and Co. of Wallingford. The PCC's bank accounts are held with the

Barclays and NatWest Banks. The PCC is a charity registered with the Charity Commission.

The Youth and Community Hall

The running of the hall was disrupted by COVID during 2020, being forced to close from March 23rd.

Income was therefore significantly decreased with only £8,011.52 being received in fees, compared to £25,705 in 2019. However, we did qualify for a Government Business rate grant for Community Halls, administered by the district council, which provided a further £11,539. The expenditure also decreased from £19,728 to £16,037.85, but many of the costs still remained even though the hall wasn't being used, including servicing and maintenance. This meant that there was still a reduced operating surplus of £3,512.67 prior to depreciation. This would not have been the case without the government support.

It should be noted that whilst there remains a surplus of assets over liability, we need to build up reserves for any major expenditure, especially as there remains significant cracking of the walls which remain under investigation and could be expensive to fix.

Reserves Policy

It is PCC policy to try to maintain a balance on free reserves (net current assets) to smooth out fluctuations in cash flow and to meet emergencies. The balance of the free reserves at the year end was £94,380.64, which is lower than last year.

The balance of £11,332.94 in the restricted funds is principally retained towards maintaining the building and meeting the upkeep of the churchyard. In addition, there is a restricted fund, held for Great Western Park Church, which had a year-end balance of £62,027.05.

It is our policy to invest the short-term investment fund balances with the CCLA Church of England Deposit Fund.

Maintaining and developing the church building and churchyard

Churchyard

Throughout the year, a slightly smaller team of volunteers have continued to work regularly, once or twice a month, to maintain the churchyard. Covid 19 has affected our numbers, with some volunteers needing to shield to protect themselves or others, and so we were not able to tackle any bigger projects, but instead continued to do our best to keep the churchyards mown and tidy.

We continue to establish level grass over the graves, when 'man-power' is available, in order to make mowing safer and easier. Another casualty to Covid was our annual Big Tidy Up where we usually tackle the heavier things such as boundaries with a larger group of helpers.

Sadly during the course of the year we have lost several of the rowan trees in the church field due to disease, and strong winds have ultimately brought them down. We now have the opportunity to think about whether they should be replaced, and if so, with what type of tree.

The two wooden seats in the new churchyard have also succumbed to age and rot, and so we need to think about appropriate good-quality replacements. They are appreciated by visitors who come to tend graves and like to sit a'while.

In terms of other maintenance, we still have an amount of outstanding lime mortar work throughout the churchyard which has been delayed. The work is very weather dependent and requires specialist contractors.

Other projects delayed by Covid were the new cremations memorial area on the eastern side of the new churchyard, and the replacement of the church bell tower ladder. We hope to get these moving along again in 2021.

As we mentioned last year, the average age of the group is creeping evermore upwards and more younger volunteers are urgently needed to help us keep our churchyards tidy, safe and welcoming.

The possibility of the front and north churchyards being formally closed is ongoing. If they can be, then the town or district council will take over the maintenance at a basic level.

Church Path and Lighting Project

With all permissions in place and a contractor agreed, works started on site 10th February. Firstly, the uneven Yorkshire stone path leading up to the church porch was lifted and removed from site - later sold on and monies received ploughed back into the project. Some of the better stone slabs were used to form the entrance aprons under the lych gate and adjacent the porch. With better path gradients this enabled us to lay a level entrance into church so removing one of the steps up into the porch - that then delivered easier access for all. The coloured tarmac path was soon laid linking these two York stone aprons. A gravel path was then constructed to link the front of

the church around to the hall, so giving a clean sound surface under foot. Jennifer & Stuart Roberts kindly donated a tonne of fine gravel so that the existing path between the hall and churchyard could then be resurfaced.

New Lighting standards were installed in late March so that the footpath could be illuminated from the lych gate straight through to the hall. New improved lights were also fixed to the west side of the church. Final electrical connections were completed on 20th April, which included automatic summertime adjusting timeclocks. These works have vastly improved people's ease of access around the church, especially during the hours of darkness.



The reactions to the finished project have been great - easy, safe access throughout and removal of so many trip hazards. The lighting in the evenings making access feel a lot safer.

The final cost of the project was £41,850.64 but after the benefit of various grants All Saints' paid £13,793.14, making a significant long term improvement with excellent value

for money. This was only possible with the hard work of Sue Scane and Ali Goodall who secured a grant towards the project of £22,000 from FCC - they distribute landfill tax to help fund community projects. To release this grant a 11% contribution had to be paid by a third party, so I would like to thank Sue Scane and her family for this generous donation to make this project happen.

Noticeboards

After all the various planning and DAC permissions were in place, two new noticeboards were installed at All Saints' during the summer: one in the current churchyard and another on the approach to the hall. We would like to thank Julia Buckel for all her effort in sourcing and getting these two useful noticeboards into the ground. They have proved very useful in this past year with keeping people up to date with what has happened within church and all the changes that we have all had to cope with. They are also vital in displaying our various churchyard rules - these in turn help our volunteers who maintain our grounds at All Saints. In the future they will also advertise events at church and within the hall. The cost of both boards was just over £2,500.



Tree works

After a tree inspection, we have found that several trees needed professional work. A severe storm last year damaged a few trees including many of the Rowan trees lining the church field margin; unfortunately these trees were also badly infected with Ganoderma fungus which made them vulnerable to wind damage. The remaining three Rowans will be felled and we will look at replanting in the future - perhaps we could think of individually sponsoring a tree to replace those lost?

The ancient Yew, which has a Tree Preservation Order, will have some specialist work as multiple new growths on the trunk have grown then failed after strong wind have rocked their attachment points. There will be a reduction in the canopy to allow fewer but stronger branches to grow and mature.

SODC has granted planning permission for all these works to go ahead.



Bell Tower Ladder

It was highlighted that we needed to replace the bell tower ladder for Health and Safety reasons. We have had a couple of quotes for this work and a DAC faculty to proceed with the works has been applied for.

The replacement ladder will be made of aluminium and powder coated brown to match the oak beams. It will pivot at the top of the bell tower so allowing it to be pulled back in position much like a standard ladder. It will have a lower section which will slide down to anchor on the floor. There will also be a protective section so that when in the rest position against the wall it cannot be climbed. The current wooden ladder is vertical and attached to the cross beams so that you can't actually use some of the rungs as you climb up, hence the architect recommending this safety improvement for access. We look forward to seeing this being installed during 2021.

All Saints' Youth and Community Hall



Demand for Hall hire continued to be strong at the start of 2020 and many booking requests had to be refused due to the shortage of suitable booking

slots. However, the Covid-19 pandemic caused the Hall to be abruptly closed in March when national lockdown started and it remained closed until September 13th.

The second lockdown meant that the Hall had to close again on 5th November and it was still closed at the end of 2020. As the lockdown eases and the Hall fully re-opens, we hope to re-organise some regular booking times in order to allow more efficient usage of the facilities.

The PCC remains extremely thankful to the volunteers on the Hall management committee for ensuring the hall operates smoothly. Some routine maintenance and general tasks continue to be carried out, as required, by Paul Smith on an hourly rate, others are done by volunteers.

During 2020, monitoring of the wall cracks revealed seasonally cyclical movement as previously. One new thin crack appeared on the east wall at the south end.

Following advice from Price and Myers, three trial pits were dug around the North and East walls to establish the integrity of the footings. It was established that at the NE corner (where the cracking is worst) the footings were indeed faulty with the block work overhanging footings and what appeared to be some loose rubble between the bottom of the blocks and the top of the footings. Although no immediate work was necessary, Price and Myers recommended traditional underpinning for about 20m along the N and E walls. They quoted for preparing an Invitation to Tender document but are unable to provide project

management services for such a project.

In August, a wireless network link was constructed to allow Internet access from the church, which required two additional mains power sockets to be installed above the chair cupboard in the main hall. A small amount of work was carried out in the office to facilitate the wireless network connection to the church.

Finances were obviously impacted by the Covid-19 enforced closures but this was offset by a Small Business Grant of £10,000 from SODC, for which we are very grateful to the Treasurer as the application process required substantial work. Full finance details are presented separately. Nicky Tarling is still employed as the cleaner but was placed on the Government furlough scheme for the periods when the Hall was closed due to Covid-19 related restrictions.

Updating of the Terms and Conditions continued during 2020.

Helen Barrett resigned at the start of the year and Anne Phillips was employed as temporary administrator. In October, a formal recruitment process was undertaken resulting in Anne being employed permanently.

Community Outreach

Rev. Debbie Lord has started a ministry as Priest in the Community and has provided the following report on what was done in 2020.

Having followed God's call to come to Oxfordshire in August 2019, we were, at the start of 2020 beginning to find our way around our new surroundings, getting to know neighbours and church family and enjoying the experience! Throughout those early months the call to pray for Didcot and especially those yet to discover God's love for themselves took us into new and varied conversations. This adventure continued even through the subsequent unexpected global pandemic, as all of us grappled with the challenges that each lockdown brought. To say that 2020 was an unprecedented year of change is of course an understatement. But even though there was and still is much to ponder, grieve, and learn from in the sorrows of 2020, there is also reason to give thanks and remember with gladness. God is no stranger to human suffering and displacement, and as I look back through some of the activities we participated in, I see creative and warm grace notes which are signs of His presence in the life of our community.

Alongside the online Sunday services that Andy and others contributed to, Hannah, Simeon and I offered Midweek Worship; contemporary songs, prayers and a short thought for the day which were taken up by a variety of people, not all of them previously connected to any church. We were encouraged by

the number of people tuning in and also the amazing way that senior citizens- local and further afield- had risen to the challenge of learning how to use social media. Despite the limitations, these new-to-many forms of communication became a life line. And so we took these observations into our prayers, and thought about crafting new forms of worship. Thy Kingdom Come 2020, a global prayer movement was an opportunity we responded to, and our two online sessions featured readings, songs, and reflection around the thought that we as believers are called to pray for others to discover the Christian faith. It was heartening that so many church members joined in; our prayer life was strengthened.

Around this time, as a family we were getting to know our neighbours better through distanced conversations after the weekly NHS clap, and social media chats. It was an absolute treat to share musical moments from our driveway as the nation recalled VE Day, and wave at our neighbours as we enjoyed cream teas in our own safe spaces. We were becoming aware of each other's hobbies and interests, and it was obvious that people were really glad of the contact, even though it had to be at a distance. It made me aware that one of the big challenges in the pandemic was that there was nothing to look forward to for so many people. It was impossible to predict when life might 'return to its previous reality'. And with this thought and the growing sense that sharing creative gifts could help to bring fresh purpose, deeper relationships and hope, I spent time thinking about Harvest and ways to include and encourage a different kind of celebration.

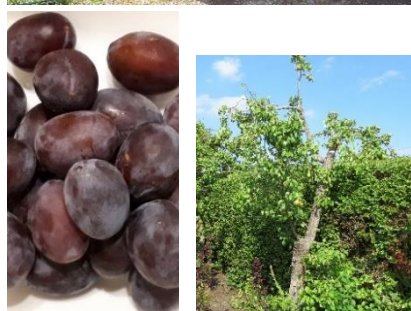


During July and August we started to prepare for an online community Harvest Festival. We called it 'Didcot Harvest Past and Present' and with the help of many people arranged for special zoom events on 25th and 27th September. Our wonderful guest presenters, Stewart and Carol Henderson, offered us encouragement, humour and literary input along the way, and we began filming conversations with church members and local farmers about their harvest memories and current harvest activities. These conversations were incredibly informative, and Hannah, Simeon and I really enjoyed the learning curve of filming; there was such warmth and welcome! Thank you to everyone who contributed. As relative newbies to Didcot we were learning about its history and geography, the challenges and richness of rural life past and present. It was also interesting that many people who have lived here for decades said that they discovered things from our subsequent presentations that they did not know! With regards to mission, this was a listening phase, and it has fed into our understanding of what makes

Didcot the evolving place that it is. It is also the case that our participants showed courage and a willingness to do something new, and for that we give thanks. Following the call of God to bless our neighbourhoods does involve stepping out of our comfort zones, and all of us have a part to play!

Into the mix of interviews, poems and history came some wonderful creative offerings: a huge collection of photos which people shared of their lockdown adventures growing plants veg and fruit; a 'guess the weight of the lardy cake' competition; potato juggling challenge (enjoyed by children and adults alike I recall!); a 'make an NHS Rainbow from fruit veg and flowers' photo opportunity; lively jazz from Simeon; specially recorded music from the choir; photos from Wantage Mill (one of the oldest left in the country) and interviews with Richard Kennell from SOFEA and Andrew Snell at Didcot Food Bank to bring the harvest provision stories bang up to date. Our online events would not have been possible without the care and computer expertise that Andy and Hannah contributed; editing film clips, sticking things together online and masterminding these events was an epic task. But it was such a worthwhile venture, and so many people who joined in were so glad to have been part of it. Our Friday night session showcased the many creative gifts in our community, and on the Sunday session we reflected on the story of Ruth, an Old Testament refugee who discovered the goodness of God during the barley harvest in Bethlehem. It seemed fitting as barley harvests in OX11 are a significant happening, and our prayer is that over time more people

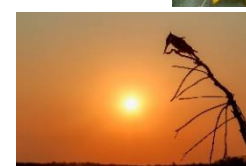
will come to discover the goodness of God in a personal way, just as Ruth did all those centuries ago.



The next step after this was crafting for an online Advent Calendar of Light. We had realised that sharing photos was something our wider community likes to do, and the idea was to provide something reflective that people could use in the run up to what was going to be a very different sort of Christmas. Our launch event on Advent Sunday with the Hendersons as guest presenters again included Carol's wonderful poem 'Unimaginable Light', a conversation about her iconography, and Stewart's poem 'Christmas Magnificat'. Our Calendar was updated daily on YouTube and had a photo, specially recorded music and a thought for the day. So many people sent us pictures on the theme of light that it was

a challenge to choose from them, but the calendar featured pictures from near and far! We are hugely grateful to Mike Kendrick and team at Wild Shots Outreach, based in Kruger National Park S.A. who sent absolutely stunning photos taken by African teenagers. If you want to know more about their vital conservation work please follow the link-

<https://www.wildshotsoutreach.org/>



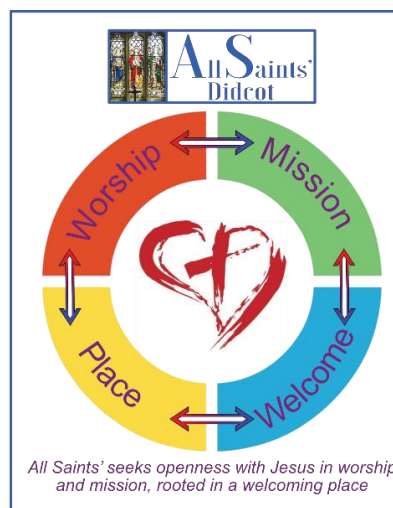
And behind all these activities was prayer. Grateful thanks must go to the small group of people who committed to pray for all these activities, asking that God would bring hope and light to many homes. We finished 2020 with joyful distanced filming of Harry and Freddie talking about their Christmas hopes, and their understanding of who baby Jesus is. Another reminder that we all have a part to play in sharing the Good News in our communities-however young or old we are! For that is the best news of all; *God moved into the neighbourhood, became one of us so that we might know his friendship and goodness in life's adventures.*

We have continued to reach out especially to families with children at

home since then, and are excited about the opportunities ahead.

Vicar's Report

At the start of 2020, I had been at All Saints' for four months and we were reviewing our life and mission together, which was helping me settle and understand what everyone valued about All Saints'. This was interrupted rather suddenly by the pandemic that changed everything whilst also perhaps highlighting more clearly what we wanted to hold onto together. I came back to reflect on all that had been shared in November and came up with the following diagram:



We value All Saints' as a place of welcome, seeking to develop worship for the regulars and mission in the community. The side chapel window of Mary and Martha continues to speak to me of our desire to keep together the closeness to Jesus in prayer and worship with the active mission in our local (and wider) community, seeking to serve and witness in Didcot and beyond. We have collected a great list of the community groups that we are each involved in and put together a cycle of prayer that embraces these alongside our mission charities, community concerns and individual

needs. At the heart of our life is the love of God seen in Christ.

During the pandemic we have continued these same themes, if in different ways. Our worship moved online and become more varied. We have had challenges with streaming from church but great work has been done on this by a number of people; the virtual choir has kept us in touch with familiar voices lifted up in worship – thanks to Paul for a huge amount of work on this; Quiet Space has provided monthly reflections at home – thanks to Peter & Lottie; the Healing Group with monthly prayer themes via email – thanks to Stuart & Jennifer; and we have tried shorter YouTube worship from home – with thanks to Debbie, Simeon & Hannah. In the early months, I provided reflections each week to help us think and pray through the challenges, which have now transformed into a monthly ministers letter. We have settled into a routine of weekly Facebook live services and tried Zoom services around Easter, Ascension and Thy Kingdom Come. Plenty of learning going on! Our faith has often been stretched but this is so often the invitation to growth. We are encouraged to be honest about what we have lost and found so difficult and to see the God who is found in the wounded Christ who embraces us.

Mission in the community has become more challenging with the distancing and lockdowns, although phone calls, Zoom and help with food and transport have made such a difference for people. With the significant challenges families have faced, we have tried a mix of online specials around the festivals with activity bags distributed to a

growing number of children, many of whom have not been regular at All Saints' (with thanks to all involved in this). Who knows where this will lead! We did some brilliant Harvest online specials that drew on the wisdom of many at All Saints' as well as those in the farming community and local food charities.



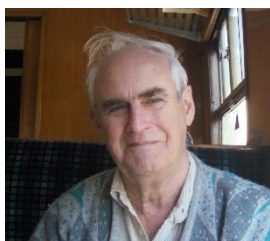
Although we have not been able to welcome people into our church building, we continue to welcome people virtually and have seen a number of people become regular at All Saints' over Facebook who were not before. Our weekly Zoom chats have been invaluable in sustaining the lives of those of us involved, providing a place of care and prayer. All those people who phone round regularly have been doing an invaluable ministry that has helped sustain us.

Thank you so much to our Church Wardens, Brenda & Alastair, who have been an active tower of strength over the year. All the cleaning, organising, WiFi fixing, building care, wisdom, support and so much more have been much appreciated. Thanks also to everyone on the PCC as we have mined the depths of detail in Government guidelines to try and make sense of the next steps! Thanks to Sue as Treasurer, who has been a wise guide through a time when our income has gone down significantly and we are reliant on our reserves (a hint to review your giving!). We have all appreciated the time put in by the choir, by those who have learned how to record

themselves reading & interceding, and those who have kept the churchyard in such good repair. Thanks also to Anne in the office – she stepped up after Helen left as our Administrator into what has been a challenging year and has done so well! She has enabled us to open the Youth & Community Hall when guidelines have allowed, alongside the grants that Sue Scane has been able to obtain to maintain this vital community building. Personally, I have also benefitted from the support of Josie, Mark, Hugh, Tim, Nick, and of course Debbie(!), as our local ministers who have given above and beyond through the year.

Some of our plans have been inevitably on hold in regard to our buildings and churchyard but we have begun the process of closing the old parts of the churchyard (in front of and behind the building) which were full in the 1960s. This does not prevent burials in existing graves but the maintenance will transfer to the Town Council.

We do continue to give thanks for those who have left this life in the secure hope of resurrection life with Christ. This last year, amongst others, we remember Philip Shipman who served All Saints' and GWP in many ways over the years.



I have been pondering what we have been learning over this very unusual year. In many ways we have simply kept going, sought to keep sustaining ourselves in worship and caring for those around us. The months have

rushed by, from lockdown to lockdown, from hot sunshine to dull winter months. Through this we have been forcibly reminded that the Christian faith is lived out primarily in the places we live and amongst the people we meet (our 'frontline'). The church, as a gathering of Christians, exists to resource and nourish this kind of practical and outward looking faith. All Saints' has sought in different ways to resource our Christian lives with God.

We need resources for prayer and worship that are not limited to the building, but help us at home, with our families, in the challenging places. How might we continue and extend our online offerings and activity bags?

We need ways of supporting life in Christian community even when our community is distanced due to pandemic or the more general health and practical realities. How can we deepen our sense of community together?

We need to sustain lives that act for the good of others and resist the constant temptation to withdraw. How can we reach out in mission when our resources are limited?

These are questions that might guide us as we gently ease out of the restrictions. A common theme in a number of discussions in recent weeks has been that of prayer. The need to encourage one another in our lives of prayer, to deepen our experience of God, to know Jesus close by, to seek the provision of the Holy Spirit. I am so thankful for the Lord's provision over this last year, a year which was not what we expected when we arrived in Didcot! It has been great to get to know

you better and we much appreciate your kindness to our family.

This coming year we look forward to Sasha joining us as curate, with Matt, and we pray for grace, wisdom, steadfastness and hope as we walk together with Jesus.

Structure, Governance and Management

The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC is a Registered Charity.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. At All Saints', the membership of the PCC consists of the incumbent, licensed lay ministers, churchwardens, representatives on Deanery Synod and members elected by those members of the congregation who are on the Electoral Roll of the church. All those who attend our services / members of the congregation are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent. New members receive initial training into the workings of the PCC.

Given its wide responsibilities, the PCC has a number of sub-committees each dealing with a particular aspect of parish life. These committees, which include worship and faith development, mission and outreach, fundraising, building development and the Youth and Community Hall management committee, are all responsible to the PCC and report back to it. Apart from the Standing Committee, which is the

only committee required by law and has power to transact the business of the PCC between its meetings as directed by the PCC, the sub-committees are advisory and do not have executive powers.

The PCC met for six scheduled meetings through the year. After the introduction of lockdown restrictions from March, most of these were held over Zoom. The PCC also met for a number of shorter *ad-hoc* meetings mostly in order to approve risk assessments for use of the church and the hall.

Annual Parochial Church Meetings are normally held just before or just after Easter. However, the Diocese permitted much-needed flexibility by extending the deadline for holding APCMs. All Saints' held its 2020 APCM on 11th October.

The Ladygrove Church

The Ladygrove Church, which is an Anglican/Baptist Local Ecumenical Partnership, is a parish in its own right. It is still, however, a part of the All Saints' benefice.

Deanery Synod

The deanery synod provides PCCs with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the church. The Revd David Rice is the Area Dean for the Wallingford Deanery, which includes Didcot (St Peter's, All Saints', Great Western Park and Ladygrove), Harwell, Chilton, Cholsey, Moulsoford, Hagbourne, Blewbury, Upton, South & North Moreton, Aston Tirrold & Aston Upthorpe, Wallingford, Crowmarsh Gifford & Brightwell-cum-Sotwell.

Meetings of the deanery synod in 2020 were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, only two deanery synod meetings were held and four meetings of the deanery synod standing committee.

The main focus of the year was to progress the mission action plan (MAP). This was an important piece of work, designed to support the mission of individual parishes and guide the life of our synod. The MAP is designed to help the deanery to focus on the issues considered important at PCC level in order to reflect these up to the diocese, providing vital input into Bishop Steven's Common Vision. The MAP was presented to the Dorchester Mission and Pastoral Committee in October 2020 and was well received.

Our MAP has four key focus areas:

- 1. Development of ministry to children, young people & families**
- 2. Developing our outreach to new & settled communities**
- 3. Development of appropriate patterns of worship**
- 4. Development of the Ministry in the Greater Didcot Garden Town area, both financially and structurally,**

One initiative emerging from the MAP was the creation of a programme of Pilgrim Path walks across the deanery, to link parishes and benefices. Four walks were planned as part of this programme, these being Blewbury, Wallingford, the Astons and Didcot/Hagbourne. Each pilgrimage was planned to start and end with prayers and refreshments would be

included. Unfortunately, this programme was brought to an abrupt halt by the pandemic and will be rescheduled at a later date.

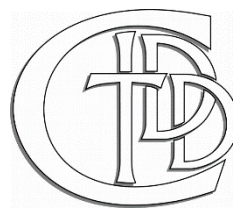
Another initiative to emerge was the Youth Initiative, working to develop a standalone Youth Trust to better equip secondary age youths; this involves churches in the Greater Didcot area and ecumenical partners.

At the meeting on the 11th of March 2020, Rachel Brockie spoke about the work of The Children's Society and how some children today live through some awful experiences. The Children's Society help by campaigning for law changes to make life safer for children at risk, helping children to access the mental health support they need, striving to stamp out the trafficking of young people and criminal exploitation etc.

The meeting on the 24th of November 2020 focused on developing the church online, acknowledging that most churches had introduced an online service facility at some point since the start of the pandemic. The guest speaker was Revd Matt Hogg from St Alban's, Fulham who spoke about online church, particularly social media, and how that can be used to connect with people, including those who attend church physically.

Finally, the Parish Share for 2021 was negotiated; this highlighted that some parishes would not be able to meet their parish share in 2021 and that others would struggle. For some parishes this is an ongoing problem, for others it is a direct result of the pandemic.

Ecumenical relationships



The church is a member of Churches Together in Didcot and District (CTDD).

A Women's World Day of Prayer service was organised in March. Plans were also drawn up for an Ecumenical Lent Study Group but that had to be cancelled.

Options were investigated for Good Friday, and Contact details for all Churches circulated for Easter.

Information was circulated to Church leaders on Services During Coronavirus.

We have not been able to have meetings of the enabling group (committee) or an AGM, due to the Coronavirus, but the offices have continued.

Andrew Jones continues as Convenor (chair).

The Didcot and District Christian Aid Committee, D & D Christian Aid, was not able to organise anything for Christian Aid Week, but information was circulated.

A Coronavirus-secure version of the Christian Aid Sponsored Walk took place in October, on the Downs, and that raised £1,118, with £430 from All Saints and £372.50 from Great Western Park. The Chilton Plant Sale raised £595.

Safeguarding

We seek to be a church that provides a safe and secure environment for the

most vulnerable in our church and in the wider community and, therefore, place major importance on the implementation of all safeguarding policies to enable this. We are working towards a vision where every member of the church sees themselves as a part of providing this environment for the most vulnerable.

[DBS \(Disclosure and Barring Service\)](#)

During the year, a number of additional people received DBS clearance for work with children, young people and vulnerable adults. The clearance provider for the Diocese is Access Personal Checking Services Ltd. as recommended by the Church of England. We are very grateful for the work that Tim Scane has carried out as verifier (viewing applicants' documents to confirm their identity) and keeping track of when people are due for renewal.

[Safeguarding Policies and Training](#)

The recommendations in the Safeguarding Policy are adhered to in all activities relating to safeguarding and recruitment. The PCC has an ongoing Promoting a Safer Church Action Plan which is reviewed annually, although the pandemic reduced our usual activities.

A copy of the Safeguarding Handbook is available in the Vicar's vestry and online. We follow its procedures for dealing with any safeguarding concern or allegation. We recognise the importance of being sensitive to any issues that may be raised and responding appropriately.

Training has continued on-line for those in the relevant roles. Eleanor Hards,

the safeguarding officer, has completed all the required training.

The Church of England from time to time also provides Safeguarding learning reviews arising from serious situations elsewhere.

[Safeguarding issues](#)

There were no major pastoral situations during 2020 which raised safeguarding issues.

During the year, the major safeguarding issue was the Covid-19 pandemic. National and Church of England guidance was followed at all times, with frequent updating, in relation to both the Church premises and the Youth and Community Hall.

[Health and Safety](#)

David Ralston has taken over responsibility for health and safety; many thanks to Peter Baker for all that he has contributed over the years.

Covid-19 has created challenges to both the church and the hall. One positive outcome of the pandemic is the reduction in risk owing to fewer people being in or around the premises. No accidents were recorded during the year and no Test and Trace contact notifications were linked to either the church or the hall. There is an expectation that further challenges will arise as the lockdown restrictions are lifted.

A lot of effort was put into production of coronavirus risk assessments for both the church and hall. In all cases, these were produced in the light of both government and Church of England guidance.

A big thank you to David for drafting the assessments and to PCC members for making time for online meetings to approve them.

We continue to look at issues around accessing the bell tower and other areas presenting fall-from-height hazards such as using the staircase giving access to the old Rood Loft.

Administrative information

All Saints' Church is situated in Lydalls Road, Didcot. It is part of the Dorchester Episcopal Area in the Diocese of Oxford within the Church of England. The correspondence address for the church is: The Administrator, All Saints' Youth and Community Hall, Roman Place, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 7ER.

The website address is:

www.didcotallsaints.org.uk



The Didcot All Saints' Church Community Page can be found on Facebook.

PCC members who have served at any time during 2020 are:

Ex-Officio members:

Incumbent: The Revd. Dr Andy Lord
Associate Minister, GWP Church:

The Revd. Mark Bodeker

Wardens: Mr Alastair Adams
Miss Brenda Andrews

Licensed Lay Ministers:

Dr Nick Hards

Dr Tim Scane

Deanery Synod Representatives:

Mrs. Alison Adams

Mrs Eleanor Hards (until October)

Mr. Andrew Jones (until October)

Elected members:

Mrs Julia Buckel (until October)

Mrs Clare Hamer

Mrs Eleanor Hards (from October)

Miss Anne Phillips

Mr David Ralston (from October)

Mrs Sue Scane (until October, co-opted November, Treasurer)

Dr Peter Sumner (Secretary)

Signed:

.....
Revd. Dr Andy Lord

Date:

.....



Great Western Park Church annual review 2020



Summary

As I write this update to the previous report prepared in October 2020, quite a lot has changed. We are planning to begin worshipping together (23rd May – Pentecost) and to do this in a new building, the GWP District Centre. Lifting of restrictions is also enabling us to plan for the reopening of our Community Café and to begin to welcome back families, who we have sadly missed during this pandemic. Meeting together virtually has ensured that the life of the church has continued, but not everyone has been able to engage with this. Like many other Churches and charity based groups, children (their parents) and those unable to manage Zoom or the internet generally have found this medium difficult (and tiring). It is one of our priorities that we reengage with these groups immediately we begin to gather again. As such, intergenerational services and a return to Morning Prayer and services of Holy Communion at Williams Place will be our primary focus.

Up until now, our 'live', interactive services have continued each week with a blend of contemporary worship and praise. We have focussed our bible teaching and sermons on the experience of new church congregations in the New Testament, forming in Jerusalem and in Philippi. More recently we have been looking at unanswered prayer and when God seems silent or absent. This has linked in with Life Group meetings where we have been working our way through Pete Grieg's Prayer course(s). Our services have catered for all-ages, although we recognise the difficulty for children and young people to concentrate on a live-streamed service delivered on a small screen. That said, we have enjoyed the

interactive activities which have taught bible stories and bible themes in simple, yet effective ways. We have also maintained two separate congregations with the main Sunday congregation adopting technology to meet, while those at Williams Place sharing a weekly reflection service which has been faithfully printed and distributed by staff to around a dozen residents who have worshipped from the safety of their own apartment. We have continued to offer regular reflections to our church community via a weekly Newsletter, with contributions from several of our congregation. We also meet each week for coffee and chat as part of our virtual Community Café, and have introduced a Church Quiz, recognising the importance of meeting socially. Life Groups have also continued to meet, with two new groups added, maintaining the structure and support for members both practically and spiritually.

Indeed, I am amazed and hugely encouraged by the amount of work done by so many to keep things together and to continue to offer the love of God to both our church congregation and community. In many ways it is a testament to the 'pioneering' spirit of our church and its deepening roots that we remain 'open'. It is also exciting that we are turning our efforts to opportunities for post Lockdown 'replanting' and 'flourishing'. Thank you to all of you for your faithfulness in these extraordinary times.

Establishing Traditions

One of the wonderful advantages of a relatively new church is that you can try new things. We wanted to offer a Christian community event at Christmas that focussed on 'gift' – Jesus born as a human, given without cost, offering hope and joy. Our first Carol Service on December 7th, 2019 included readings and carols and a wonderful performance by Stephen Freeman School Choir who sang to us. It was full to bursting (refer to picture below) and we were able to witness boldly, telling the story of Jesus' birth, explaining that this remained relevant to everyone. Sadly, this could not be repeated in 2020 but we will retain this as a key event in our church and community calendar going forward.



Maintaining existing ones (Traditions)

Activities Week in GWP was again popular with c 1,500 people engaging in a week of activities in July 2019, designed for children and families. At the end of the week, we invited the entire community for an evening BBQ with live music and entertainment.



Maintaining this intensity in terms of organising and running events, with a relatively small number of willing volunteers, and committing sufficient funds to ensure virtually free access to all, is demanding. Reflecting also on how we might add a more Christian focus to future events and to encourage new people to engage with GWP Church, we had planned to join with Boundary Park Sports Association to 'take over' the Sunday of their 'Bands on the Boundary' weekend event in June called 'Beyond the Boundary'. It will be like a large, traditional Church fete and another wonderful opportunity to the community together to 'reunite'. We are planning an open-air service to begin the day and then, combine interactive activities and games that would engage the whole community. BP Sports Assn. offered their facilities and infrastructure without charge. With all restrictions planned to be lifted on June 21st we hope that we will be able to go ahead with this and enjoy the day with the entire GWP community.



Progress and Challenges

GWP Church was designated a Conventional District on 20th November 2020. This triggered the transfer of those within the Leadership team onto a newly formed PCC, with an update of the Electoral Roll, election of Church Wardens – Kath Butler and Ryan Williams, along with the appointment of Deanery synod Reps. - David and Sue Hawkins. A PCC Secretary will be appointed this coming APCM on June 13th. Much of our recent focus as a PCC has therefore been to develop new structures which underpin the operations and life of the church. This has involved creating a number of sub-groups, designating leaders for each and appointing and co-opting members of the PCC or congregation to provide oversight. Subgroups include.

Children and Families
Communications
Finance and Property
Mission and Outreach
Pastoral care
Worship

These subgroups meet regularly and present to the PCC recommendations for approval. This means for a more efficient and timelier PCC with matters for decision or agreement set out by way of note for consideration beforehand.

Although remaining part of the Benefice of All Saints', and maintaining existing parish boundaries (for which the outline of GWP sits in 4 separate parishes), the establishment of a Conventional District means independence in terms of spiritual direction and early steps to becoming a separate parish. With this comes the requirement to pay Parish Share, a timetable for increasing Share set, and which the first payment is due in 2022.

I am acutely aware that this extra work is mainly placed on those whose lives are already terribly busy. We must not overburden our most committed individuals and to recognise that we cannot do everything (right now!). More and more, we must recognise the importance of accepting God's hand and leading in all of this and that it is He who sustains us. We are required just to be faithful.

The core focus of the Church – Mission



At the heart of what we do (our DNA), is mission. One of the challenges with Lockdown has been those whose faith is new, or who are on the edge of joining, and have tended to drift away when we stopped meeting together physically. It has been hard to retain them week after week on Zoom. We are now in a new phase of rebuilding. We are also blessed to have a core of dedicated congregation who have stuck at it. Our service recordings and weekly reflections sent to the entire community have also been greatly appreciated.

Challenging those who do come has continued during our services, where we focus on an application to faith which is incarnational. We have done a number of service series focussing on the new church emerging in Acts, and then for those churches in the New Testament who are establishing themselves, such as Philippians, the lessons Paul offers in terms of relying on power of the Holy Spirit, acting in unity and keeping faithful.

This discussion and challenge have continued within our Life Groups where relationship is developed, and faith strengthened.

We recognise important life events of marriage and baptisms, joining together with families to bless and to encourage. Up until lock-down there were a good number of these. We also, sadly, marked the end of life, saying goodbye to our oldest member of our congregation, Philip Shipman. He was a great supporter of our church and faithfully joined us each Sunday even as his health diminished. The Covid pandemic robbed many of the chance to attend his funeral, however we will celebrate his life and contribution to ours by way of a memorial gathering later this year.

Given the congregation dynamics, many of those who come have young families. We continued to engage with families, as best we could during lockdown, and in the absence of Claire Wren, our Children and Families worker who is currently on maternity leave, we introduced Blankety Church, where families could meet together (socially distanced) to worship simply around a Christian theme.

What might be the next steps?

Getting into a building to begin worshipping again has been a crucial first step. We are not quite there yet but will 'rejoice' when we finally get to be together in our new home in the centre of GWP, the District Centre. Again, as I write this, there is still a huge amount to do, but with the right engagement from the District Council all the ingredients are there for it to be our long-term base both for services and outreach into the community. There we plan to begin 'replanting' after a period of 'pruning' (I appreciate that I am mixing metaphors here!), advertising the church to the entire community and welcoming everyone back.

Working in the Community

After six years working as founding Governor and latterly Chair of Governors at UTC Oxfordshire, I decided to step down. This was in June (2020) and seemed the right time, coinciding with the first appointed Head teacher leaving in April and the appointment of a capable replacement. I will still maintain some connection with regular visits and assemblies but will use the additional time now available for rest and prayer.

Recent conversations with the Head suggest that the UTC will be open for inviting groups back to use the building from September. This would include GWP Church if required.

I continue to work as Trustee of the GWP Boundary Park Sports Assn. and offer time within local primary schools with visiting and assemblies.

Those who make our Church thrive.

I am incredibly grateful for so many who work so hard to underpin all the work that goes on in our Church and beyond it into the community. I sense that this is not a chore, or something done out of duty, but rather an offering of ourselves because we believe doing God's work is transformative both to individuals and communities. Many who come to our gatherings talk of the atmosphere of welcome and hospitality. This is something we offer naturally. But it needs saying, that all this would not be possible without the unconditional effort of so many. So, thank you.

The way ahead

The passage in Acts 16 where Paul and Silas find themselves locked away in prison is one of those which we remember as having a happy ending. We celebrate with both men, God answering their prayers, the earthquake and the conversion of the entire jailer's family. A mighty story of transformation and change.

But I sometimes wonder whether we miss some of the teaching in this story in the way it unfolds. Paul and Silas are being faithful and proclaiming God's mercy and grace, railing against the inequalities taking place in a place of prayer. Their orders to free a slave girl with a spirit of divination went against the interests of her owners, who stood to lose a great deal of money if this girl was healed. So, her owners accuse Paul and Silas and have them beaten and thrown into jail. Even though the story, set out in Acts, is described in few words, we realise that those who oppose these men are serious and will do whatever it takes to get things back to normal. So, Paul and Silas suffer a mock trial, are stripped, beaten with rods and then receive a severe flogging.

For those of us wanting to image the whole story, this prelude, which gets us to the point of release and conversion must have been dramatic and frightening for the two accused. Of course, this makes the miracle of the earthquake and being set free, whilst they languish in jail, even more dramatic. But what would have it been like for Paul and Silas as they waited for their fate to be determined?

We have not been in anything like similar circumstances as we have worked our way through this pandemic. But to simply jump to a 'normal' situation, the good ending, would be to ignore what we have all gone through getting to this point. It has been difficult. Most of us have suffered loss. To put it another way, we lose so much if we simply focus on the good bits, of reunion and the joy of having a hug.

We want all these people to return but are not sure that they will or how to go about reengaging with them again. This prolonged period of absence has meant for many of us a loss of contact with those we feel most comfortable with – those in our church family. So, what will it be like to meet up again? Will they remember me and to what extent should I hope that our relationships can go back to something like there were?

In our often busy and stressful lives there seems merit in offering to God our biggest fears, knowing that we do not have the answers, that it is only in the silence where we are really able to hear God speaking to us.

Mark Bodeker – May 2021 (updated)