

Report for St Mary's, Wavendon Annual Church Meeting, 12th October 2020

Monday 23rd March 2020 – the original date of our Annual Church Meeting – was the date that the first national lockdown in decades started. It seems appropriate to note this fact at the start, because in many ways it is almost impossible to remember life BC – Before COVID. The fact that we had 11 months and 364 days of 'normal' church life to celebrate before this life-changing season is very difficult to do justice to now.

And yet there was a huge amount to celebrate in the 12 months between the AGM in 2019 and what would have been the AGM in 2020:

- The church grew numerically for the first time in many years. We've all experienced the growing sense of energy and empowerment around the place for much longer, but 2019 was significant in that it was the first time this renewed sense of energy and vision reflected in actual growth. That is worth celebrating!
- We completed two large projects – the new chancel roof and the new boiler – both entirely paid for thanks to generous grants given by MK Council and Townlands Charity. These two projects complete the major work required on the fabric of the church (God willing) for the next 10-20 years. What we can look at now are 'upgrades' – like a retractable projector screen or a more welcoming porch – and not just essential repairs.
- Our community ministry continued to flourish – coffee morning in 2019 was more popular than ever; we took services and events into Milton Court 3x/month; monthly Quiz Nights regularly brought in 40-50 people. Our schools work thrives, with assemblies, church visits and other events, and the Summer Fair was another great occasion. We hosted a wonderful Wavendon Winter Music Festival in February, which saw 130 visitors enjoy no less than four community choirs. Looking ahead, we also agreed the lease on a room in the old school building, giving us new, permanent office/community development space for the first time.
- New ministry projects which had started in 2018 continued to bear fruit in 2019 – Cafe Church was starting to draw in more families; Prayer after services was a great blessing to many; the evening home group had a committed group of attendees.
- Spring 2020 saw St Mary's host the Bible course for the Partnership with 59 people taking part overall, including more than 20 from St Mary's. November 2019 also saw us host the MK Confirmation service, with 8 members of our churches confirmed, including 3 from St. Mary's.
- Our work on the new estates had made a very encouraging start. The re-sited church school opened on time in September 2019 and our close links continued. A weekly coffee morning for parents and community was up and running before the end of the first month; two open community meetings were held for local residents; a wonderful Christmas outreach event brought along more than 40 people, mostly from the estate itself. By the spring of 2020 we had been prayer walking monthly round the new estate areas for 4 years and plans for the new Pioneer were almost complete....

....and then COVID. It's hard to overstate how much our current lives divide between Life Before and Life During/Since....

But the season since 23rd March, whilst traumatic at the national level, and challenging at the personal level, has not been without many extraordinary things to celebrate. We have changed radically, but crises can work both ways, bringing new birth and hope in the midst of trial. I believe this is true for us, and there are so many things to give thanks for:

- First and foremost I want to thank all of you for **pulling together so wonderfully during this season.** Within days of the lockdown we had a pastoral phone team arranging those who wanted to be put in touch with each other for mutual support. Many of us also learned how to use new technology to stay in touch – myself included! The level of encouragement for each other went through the roof. We've long been a caring family but this season has seen a broadening of this attentiveness and care that has gone well beyond where we had been previously. For that we can be immensely thankful.

- **We have also grown dramatically, online.** Exact figures are hard to calculate, but for instance 192 people clicked the link to the Harvest service on our Facebook page. That figure doesn't include anyone who gets the church email, or the people they send it to, or those who access the church service via the website, which at a conservative estimate would be another 150 – or indeed the same groups of people (email, Facebook, website) accessing the same service via our sister church of All Saints. That is a lot of people! For all that it has been painful not to have the sort of face-to-face community that we love and would naturally choose, God is doing something remarkable and leading us in an unexpected but very exciting direction.
- Alongside this, **we have kept well over half of our regular church ministry going online.** We may have lost the church coffee morning and work in Milton Court temporarily (although our online service is sometimes shown in the lounge!), but using Zoom we still have the school weekly coffee morning, a weekly (not fortnightly) Rock Solid group for 9-14s, and regular youth cell group, two home groups, a monthly Quiz Night, weekly Whatsapp prayer meeting and coffee after 'church' on Sunday.
- **We've added new things too:** Daily Inspiration, Good News stories, and a lot more voices to our online worship, which usually has 20-30 people involved in some way – whether via prayers, readings, responses or contributing photos and artwork.
- I also want to say **a huge thank you to the team who have allowed us to meet together in person** since July and have looked after the churchyard since the spring – to Roger H, Ann B, Joyce, Mike and Brian, and also to Alise, Amelie, Philip and Jacob whose work to deliver the online services has been outstanding. Despite everything, we have kept a noticeable physical presence in our home of 800 years and the site remains in good shape: we're still looking forward to a new Garden of Rest and larger shed facility next year – hopefully!
- **Further thanks are also in order** 😊: to Trish as Steward and Tower Captain; to Colin, Matt, Philip and B for their musical expertise; to Keith, Alan, Melvyn, B, Joyce, Ruth G, Leslie, Alise and Lisa for leading services; to Mike our treasurer, Ann our Secretary and Joyce our Banns Administrator and Health & Safety Officer; to Trish and Emily our School Governors; to Christine, Alise, Trish and Gemma for hosting coffee morning and to all the bakers serving us with lovely cakes; to Melvyn, Colin, Tanja, Cali and Alise for their work at Milton Court; to Colin and Pam for Quiz Night; to Ann H for supporting wedding and funerals ministry; to Adrian for his technical wizardry; to Lisa, Joyce, Lianne and Gemma for Children's Church; to Carol for Rock Solid and Youth Club; to Lisa for Prayer Walks; to Christine & Elizabeth for our lovely flowers; to Keith H, Barry, Brian, Roger H, Roger I and Alex for maintenance; to the cleaning team offering their hard work behind the scenes; to all the readers, prayers and coffee servers – you know who you are!

There is, though, one person I deliberately haven't mentioned yet who I want to thank particularly, and whose contribution runs through so much of what has been shared above – and that is to **Ray Holmwood**, who is stepping down after a remarkable 12 years as churchwarden. Ray has been a pillar in our church life for many years and there isn't much that he hasn't been involved with in his time. He was once Treasurer before becoming Churchwarden. He continues to serve on the Stewards' Council, on the team going into Milton Court, and the Maintenance team which looks after the building and churchyard. He leads intercessions regularly and chats to people at coffee morning. Most admirably, he does a lot of things nobody sees – meeting contractors at the church, sitting in the unheated church while the boiler is serviced or the alarm gets new batteries. He has been a faithful servant to the God he loves, and to us all. We are hugely grateful for his unstinting efforts. Thank you, Ray 😊

I'm delighted that Roger Hancock has settled in brilliantly as Churchwarden over the last couple of years, and am hugely grateful for all he's done already. Do continue to offer him your full support, especially as we navigate this season and also look to bring in someone alongside him in time to come.

As I draw these reflections to a close, my sense is that what is happening to the Church nationally and globally might very well be the biggest change since the Reformation 500 years ago. Our buildings may be restricted or even closed, but **God is putting church and faith decisively back into people's homes and everyday lives** – where it needs to be most, and always should have been. Connecting people with God in this more direct way was what the Reformation was about all those years ago, and if the Church responds with similar enthusiasm and creativity, this can be true for us now. There are choppy waters ahead, but God is at work! In the end all glory goes to Him!

With my love, prayer and blessings to you all, *Matt*