



ST PAUL'S, WOKINGHAM
with
ST NICHOLAS', EMMBROOK



PARISH REPORTS
2021



PARISH REPORTS 2021

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Introductory Note

The Annual Report prepared with the Financial Statements for the Charity Commission contains information on many aspects of parish life, including the PCC sub-committees. Parishioners are encouraged to read it in order to get a fuller picture of the life and work of the Parish in 2021. It is supplemented by the following reports.

And thank you, thank you, thank you for all you bring and offer and share and treasure and bring and... none of this would be possible without you and your heartfelt response to God's love.

Some personal reflections on the Covid Pandemic

Mary Cassidy writes:

In January 2020 I decided that I would retire at the end of the academic year, handed in my notice and planned slow, steady sorting of files etc in preparation for the big event at the end of August. Planning that came to nothing because of Covid! A matter of weeks later we were all catapulted into LOCKDOWN, I was put on furlough, my independent daughters came home to work from Wokingham and a new cycle of life began...

It took some getting used to, stuck indoors with three members of the family working and two of us creeping around trying to be quiet and helpful!

Never having been much of a walker, at first I found it really difficult to make good use of the "outdoor time" we were allowed, but gradually I discovered the pleasure of walking in beautiful green areas I didn't know existed, close to my home. This has been one of the most important lessons I have learned from the pandemic – to truly value my surroundings, to stop and smell the flowers (literally), to see God in the complexity and diversity of His glorious creation -- and to talk to Him about it as I walk. Through participating in a virtual Camino, Beat the Street and latterly Park Run has built up my stamina, my speed and my enjoyment – though I still prefer not to be out in the rain!! I also discovered how friendly people are if you give them a smile and a greeting as you pass ... and maybe even stop for a little chat about the weather or the dog or the beauty of the place!

Experiencing church in the new way of online, zoom, email (Hooray for Bertie!) and at a distance has been a positive experience for me, though I realise it cannot have been easy for all. At St Paul's we have been really blessed by the technical expertise of Peter Wells and his teams, and the willingness to experiment and "keep on keeping on" of the clergy, not just in our own parish.

Louise Turner writes:

Running the choir through the lockdowns of the pandemic was a wonderful learning experience. Very quickly at the start of our live-streaming members of the choir were extremely helpful in making recordings of hymns and other music which could be used and broadcast on YouTube. Our two organists at the time also helpfully recorded accompaniments at home. One of the basses, Chris Merchant was able and willing to put a few recordings together where members of the choir submitted their individual recordings and one of these even included a video which was used on Easter Day 2020. He also wrote a wonderful mass setting which we could use without worrying about copyright.

Choir rehearsals were conducted on zoom and a large number of the choir would join in most weeks. At first these rehearsals felt like a poor substitute for meeting and singing in person and it took some time to understand how to make the most of these sessions both from a technology angle and also to get the most satisfaction possible. At first it just felt good to see each other even though it was just on a screen but as time went on it became a joy to lead these sessions. Instead of just singing and practising we would all spend time sharing experiences and discussing those of our number and beyond who might need our extra prayers. I really believe that as a group we discovered an extra depth of shared spirituality and love because of these times we shared that may not have happened otherwise. Without exception the choir have been accepting and understanding of each other's different needs and wants during this difficult time.

It is also now a joy to be able to sing together again as a group in church and obviously this privilege is not going to be taken for granted for a very long time. We are thrilled to see our number growing as we are starting back properly in church. Special mention and thanks should be made to Lesley Ruddock the choir secretary and to Christopher Cipkin for his wonderful organ playing and recordings.

Susanna Allen writes:

When lockdown occurred, our major concern was keeping in regular phone contact with our folk to reassure, signpost and link them with their friends by exchanging telephone numbers. We also organised a special telephone link whereby anyone with an ordinary phone could phone in to a dedicated number and be linked with others who wanted to chat on Fridays. This was essential to keep everyone together. After the main lockdown this service discontinued. We organised zooms with a quiz but not everyone was digitally able to partake. From the outset we set up a WhatsApp group. This was useful as we were supporting folk most days. Once we were allowed to go walking for an hour with another person we were able to help out folk really suffering from anxiety.

Once restrictions were released Coffee & Chat restarted and we were amazed at the number of folk who came despite the covid prevalence. Most had been so lonely and anxious, a large majority living on their own. Sadly we lost members but what we have learnt from lockdown is how essential Coffee & Chat is for so many of our folk. Also the quiz has now become an essential part of our sessions.

How I got through the pandemic, by Chris Cipkin

- As something of an introvert, I didn't mind lockdown too much and I certainly didn't miss the commute to work, but I still found a daily round of outdoor exercise and sunshine dose vital to good mental health. I therefore found the second lockdown in the wintery months of 2020-2021 much harder than the first. Throughout both lockdowns, music practice and making recordings for the online services gave me something outside the stress of work to focus on and helped keep me motivated.

Regular phone calls and meeting up with friends and family outdoors were also especially important, more so than video calls because, by the end of the working day spent mainly on Teams and Zoom, the last thing I usually wanted was more Zoom calls! The exception to this was weekly Zoom choir practice, which really helped up keep going as a group through the worst times.

What I prioritised

Keeping in touch with people, including my list of people assigned by the church office to keep in contact with.

Trying to live in the moment and not to look too far ahead - just taking each week at a time and leaving the future in God's hands.

Staying in good health to protect the NHS and my ability to be able to support others who depended on me.

Any costs or benefits?

We'll be dealing with the aftermath of young people's disrupted education and increased anxiety for several years to come. Many people's personal financial situations have also changed longer-term for the worse, with broader societal implications.

In considering the way back out of lockdown, we came to better appreciate and understand the broad diversity of our congregation.

Many churches, including St Paul's, have made a rapid digital shift which has helped those unable to be present in person continue to feel part of a wider worshipping community. Our digital presence has a wide international reach and provides a clearer window on what we are as a church than we had before.

And from Fr Richard, Rector of the Parish:

Here are a few things I will always remember and be thankful for...

finding a woman kneeling on the Church step by the door in prayer when the Church was locked shut to everyone, even the parish priest
working in such a committed and balanced team of leaders, who bore so much of the burden together

being back in Church for Easter 2021 and the joy of seeing the Paschal Candle processed in
the willingness of so many people to do something to help- ringing people weekly, writing letters, checking that everyone is ok
taking a funeral at the crem with 15 people allowed, when the son could not touch his grieving father to comfort him
the way that online Morning Prayer has grown and grown so that we now still regularly have 10 people praying together
standing outside Alexandra Grange Care Home, then locked down, to deliver letters and boxes of lovely handsoap, applauding the staff who were gathered in the porch from the other side of the car park
the sense of constant support and understanding from the congregations- that people never complained about not being able to do things as normal but believed that we were doing our best and supported us in that. People whose main service had not come back quickly were amazingly patient, and there was such a strong sense of togetherness throughout the whole pandemic
Bertie- oh Bertie- if ever a mouse found his moment this was it. Precisely 300 emails from the start of the pandemic to the end of 2021- and counting
the slow sense of things opening up as we went from no one in Church on a Sunday morning to a handful of people to singing hymns outside in the Churchyard when we could not sing in Church, a group of familiar faces and others who passed by and stopped to join in in the sunshine small choir to people in the nave to...
the ongoing Livestream and thinking through how to continue to value and support that vital congregation as we move ahead
the sense of privilege and fulfilment which comes from being part of something good which is making a significant and lasting difference to the community while also doing a decent job of caring for one another.

The Rector's Review of 2021

Much of the main business of 2021 is woven throughout the whole of this Report- especially the ongoing challenge, uncertainty and suffering of Covid and the attack of violence and fire which St Paul's Church suffered on the Friday before Palm Sunday when a man with mental health issues came into Church and targeted violence on altar and pulpit, Marian statue and painting of John the Baptist, on borrowed wax model and parish banner. I said then and I have kept saying that we were visited by illness and not evil. The damage was significant but nobody was hurt and the structure of the building was not threatened.

What will perhaps surprise people about the pandemic is that we were able to deal pretty well with whatever restrictions were set by the Government- what people found unsettling and difficult were the changes to rules and having to adjust the

number of people who could come to a funeral or bring weddings forward to keep the number of guests at 30, or scrabbling to work out how many people were allowed to sing in Church. It was a challenging year. But we were able to have Easter and Christmas services broadly as usual, and throughout this second year of lockdown and restrictions we were still able to share in the Eucharist and come together in worship, even if not socialise.

There were other highlights in the year. We appointed two new Deputy Wardens (one to work with the Wardens and one to lead on Mission and Spirituality), hold our first Parish Quiet Day in Advent 2021, and saw Cara ordained priest at Reading Minster. You will, each of course, have your own causes for gratitude and thanksgiving after such a challenging year. As well as these, and many others you will read elsewhere in this report, I am abidingly grateful for the way in which the parish and its elected leaders, along with the clergy team, drew instinctively together in a way which was natural, inclusive and mutually supportive. Not every parish priest was as fortunate as I have been in being the Rector of this parish during the last two years, and across the 9 and a half years since I was installed here.

And looking back like that makes me remember those from among us who died in 2021. Some of them were supportive friends of the parish, like Michael Dowling, Patricia Morton, Pam Beckett, Paul Gallagher and Prof Mick Hattaway. We miss each of them in different ways and we continue to grieve with those they have left behind, especially Sally, Reg, Hugh, Liz and Judi. St Nick's suffered several great losses this year beyond those I have already named. Tony Shortell was always a gentleman- witty, encouraging, kind. Meg Corfe was the last of a generation and we miss her straight back and her experience and her love. Geraldine Lea was a loss to St Nick's and the whole parish because of her spirituality, wisdom, friendship and strength. 2021 has been a challenging year because of these deaths in the parish, and others. There is comfort in the hope and confidence we have in Christ Jesus, but there are still large gaps where they used to sit and pray alongside us.

2021 was a year of challenge, uncertainty and great joy- and learning to value again things we had taken for granted, like praying with others, being able to sing in Church, having coffee in the Rooms after Church, holding out our hands and receiving in them nothing less than the bread of heaven.

Restoring the church building after the arson attack

On Friday the 26th of March 2021 a stranger to the parish, while mentally unwell, came into St Paul's Church and did damage to various parts of the building, partly through arson and partly through physical violence. Mercifully, the fires did not spread, nobody was hurt and the man in question was quickly found and taken to a place where he could be supported and cared for.

Sadly, two things were destroyed totally. One was the Parish banner, made by the ladies of the parish in 1890, which had hung on the pillar behind the lectern for a century and a quarter. The other was a wax maquette of Mary cradling the dead Jesus, which we had only just borrowed from the artist, Russell Bignold.

The main restoration works were approved by the Oxford DAC, through Jennie Schillig's excellent support, funded by Ecclesiastical Insurance, overseen by John Carr at Quadra (loss adjustor) and led by Richfords Fire and Flood who commissioned and coordinated the work.

Richfords in-house painting conservator, Susan M Moore FBAPCR, and her colleagues restored the 17th century painting of John the Baptist which hangs in the Walter Chapel. Alistair Price restored and replaced the singed woodwork. The replacement Lenten altar frontal and pulpit hanging came from Wippells of Exeter. There were also a number of small repairs to make, to things like lights, candlesticks and a crucifix carried out by Adam Bentley, a Decorative Arts Conservator.

It has been a complex process because so much of the building was affected, and many of them essential to the sacramental life of the Parish. What follows are before and after photos of the restoration work, and a photo of the icon, commissioned from Julia Stankova to mark our emergence from the pandemic and the completion of this project.

Fr Richard Lamey

Parish Life

Churchwardens' Annual Report on the Fabric of St Paul's Church 2021

Under Paragraph 5 (1)-(3) of Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991, the Churchwardens are required to deliver the Annual Fabric Report to the PCC, and on behalf of the PCC to the APCM (with any amendments made by the PCC), including an account of all actions taken or proposed during the previous year for the protection and maintenance of the fabric and all articles appertaining to the church.

Fabric

As we reported last year, in February 2021 a small amount of stonework fell from the North Aisle parapet copings, caused by the winter temperatures causing the moisture in the stonework to freeze. Richard Oxley, our surveyor, inspected the parapet. He prepared a detailed specification setting out the repairs that needed to be done, including the decorative blind arcading which forms part of the parapet. Tenders for this work were invited from four stonemasons. Unfortunately only one tender was received, which was well in excess of the surveyor's estimate of £15,000-20,000, reflecting the fact that contractors currently have a surplus of work. Mr. Oxley has recommended reducing the scope of the work to cover the copings only and re-tendering this work with a view to obtaining more competitive tenders when market conditions improve. There have been no further stone falls and no visible deterioration in this area over the winter.

Further inspection and repairs to the external stonework of the building, as identified in the 2018 Quinquennial Inspection list and reported to the APCM last year, are still needed. We asked the surveyor whether outstanding items from the Quinquennial Inspection list could feasibly be combined with the works to the parapet coping. His view was that for technical reasons there was no real benefit in combining the parapet works with these other works, but he provided a document showing how different works could be combined for practicability and efficiency. The next step would be to instruct the surveyor to carry out a high-level investigation of the tower pinnacles, the tiled roof slopes and the stone roof crosses.

Although the flashing on the Walter Chapel roof has been replaced, this has not completely eradicated the damp leaking into the plaster at the very top of the roof. We are still waiting for contractors to inspect and carry out any necessary further repairs.

Following an inspection of the church in 2021, our insurers requested that a full electrical inspection be carried out, as this had not been done for some time. This was done and a detailed report recommended the installation of new wiring and a new fuse box. This work was carried out during the year.

The clearing of debris from the high and low church gutters was carried out by contractors in December 2021.

Following an incident in early 2021 when items in the church were randomly rearranged, a CCTV camera was installed on a pillar, and a sign was put on the church door. The incident also raised the question of the installation of a smoke alarm. The candle stand has been fixed to the floor at the request of our insurers, and consideration was given to adding smoke detection to our existing alarm system. However a quotation for £10,000 plus on-going annual maintenance charges was not accepted. Our insurers were only prepared to give us a small reduction in our annual premium if a smoke detection alarm was installed and they have confirmed that we comply fully with their fire requirements.

The Churchyard Manager has also mentioned in his report the continuing need to carry out repairs to the drains around the church.

Repairs following arson attack in March 2021

On 26 March 2021 a severe attack took place on some of the fixtures and fittings in the church. A man, later arrested and detained under the mental health legislation, entered the church and set fire to the High Altar and its Lenten frontal, the pulpit and the St Paul's MU banner. The Lenten altar frontal and altar linen were destroyed and the front of the High Altar was severely charred. Significant fire damage was done to the top and the front of the pulpit and the Lent pulpit fall was destroyed. The lectern ..was thrown to the floor and damaged, and the wooden lectern step also burnt. Sadly, the St Paul's banner, made by the ladies of the parish in 1890, was also destroyed, and its frame and pole burnt, leaving severe scorch marks on the wall above the lectern.

In the Walter Chapel, the painting was damaged by piercing, and the wooden cross and two candle stands on the altar were damaged, as was the credence table. The choir loudspeakers were also made unusable. Thankfully, no damage was done to the organ.

Over the past twelve months, this damage has been skilfully repaired by expert restorers and paid for by our insurers Ecclesiastical, following the obtaining of the necessary faculty from the Diocese of Oxford. The High Altar and pulpit woodwork has been successfully repaired and the Lenten altar frontal and pulpit fall have been replaced. The lectern has been repaired and the wooden lectern step replaced. The wall above the lectern has been repainted. The painting in the Walter Chapel has

been repaired, as has the credence table, cross and candle stands. The banner is to be replaced by a cross-stitch wall hanging which will reflect the wide variety of groups and activities within the parish.

The opportunity has also been taken to repaint the east wall of the Walter Chapel and remove the unsightly canopy which was previously attached to the wall, and to paint the east wall of the north aisle, where an icon has recently been installed in the Lady Chapel. The floor tiles in front of the High Altar, which were scorched when the frontal was burnt, have also been cleaned.

David Ruddock and Peter Wells, Churchwardens

The Parochial Church Council

The PCC have had 5 meetings since the last APCM in July 2021, three of these were on Zoom and two in person. At all the meetings the financial position of both the church and the Parish Rooms Trust was monitored.

In July 2021, we welcomed new members including two new Deputy Wardens. We agreed the 6-month financial reports and looked at easing Covid restrictions with the restarting of coffee after church from September. The PCC also agreed to commission a new icon for the church and to seek a faculty for this.

In September 2021, among other things, the PCC spent quite a lot of time on fabric matters – the Walter Chapel ceiling, an essential electrical inspection and subsequent remedial works, the bathroom upgrade in Brook Close. Also, a request was agreed to allow the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to erect their signs in the churchyard. The PCC noted that a group of ordinands from Westcott House would be spending Holy Week 2022 in the Parish (now postponed until 2023).

In November 2021, with Covid cases rising once more the PCC considered plans for the Christmas services, in particular for the Christingle services to be held outdoors. The Parish Rooms Trust agreed salary increases for Louise and Vanessa and an increase in hours for Vanessa as she takes over more of the bookkeeping role from Rhoda. On the church financial side, the meeting agreed the purchase of some new churchyard equipment, to apply to join the Parish Giving Scheme and to make the agreed donations for 2021 to the three charities we support.

In January 2022, the PCC considered what two/three things were needed to rebuild congregations and what opportunities they saw in the coming months. Reinstating social activities was considered important, reinforcing the benefits of being in church in person and encouraging the habits of churchgoing. Members also agreed that, for some, on-line worship is more beneficial and it is important to build the on-line community. It was noted that our application to join the Parish Giving Scheme was

approved. The PCC also considered a request from McCarthy & Stone to swing a crane a short distance over the churchyard when building the new flats next door.

In March 2022, the PCC received the Churchwardens' Report which particularly highlighted the work to repair and restore the damage from the arson attack which has now been completed. The Annual Report and Accounts 2021 for both the church and the Parish Rooms Trust were agreed and a draft budget for 2022 was considered. The meeting agreed an appropriate increase in hire charges for the Parish Rooms from September. It was noted that we would be seeking a new churchwarden and up to 6 new PCC members at the forthcoming APCM.

Lesley Ruddock (PCC Secretary)

Safeguarding

With church activities resuming, DBS checks are being updated and new ones undertaken to ensure we have the appropriate number of suitable adults supporting our activities. The Diocese has also introduced a new Dashboard which allows each parish to check that it is up to date with the work it should have done around the safeguarding of both children and vulnerable adults- it is a very simple traffic light system which highlights the things which still need to be done. We discuss Safeguarding on every PCC Agenda since it is such an essential part of the life of the Church- we need to be a place where everyone is safe and allowed to flourish.

Chris Barker is doing an excellent job in her part of the role, but we still need to replace John Foster as Safeguarding Manager, ensuring that we are following the processes around safeguarding with precision. If you would like to find out more about what is a flexible but vital job, please speak to me or Chris Barker. Thanks.

And please do remember that Safeguarding is the task of the whole Church- if someone tells you something or you see something you are not happy or easy with then do please speak to Chris urgently.

Fr Richard Lamey

St Nicholas' Pro-Wardens' Report

After another Covid break, beginning just before Christmas 2020, our services began again at St Nicholas' on 18th April. It was a joy to be back at The Village Hall even if it was still under Covid restrictions. We are now able to sing again and enjoy fellowship over coffee after our service, which are important parts of life at St Nick's.

Thank you to the technical wizards who brought us the weekly streamed services when we couldn't worship together in person.

The year had its many sadnesses with family illnesses and bereavements. We had to say goodbye to our good friends Mick Hattaway, Tony Shortell, Meg Corfe and Geraldine Lea. Sadly some members of our congregation also had to say goodbye to

special loved ones, and additionally, like many churches, we have members who for one reason or another can't make it physically to church anymore. May those who have died Rest in Peace and Rise in Glory! As always, the St. Nicholas' family, our fellowship groups, the clergy and members of the whole parish family prayed for and supported those who had to learn to come to terms with their losses. Our friends at St Paul's very thoughtfully baked cakes for us to have at our first coffee time, because we had had such a difficult year, and at times felt bruised and battered.

Despite the sadnesses there were some joyful times.

Some of our congregation shared the joy of welcoming grandchildren in to their families and other good news of family achievements and events. Fr. Richard was made an Honorary Canon of Christ Church, Oxford and Judi celebrated the 10th Anniversary of her Priesting. Congratulations to them all!

Judi led us in a Zoom Good Friday meditation and it was lovely to welcome her back to celebrate the First Mass of Christmas at the Village Hall after a really sad and tough year for her.

The St. Nick's Council met in October for the first time since March 2020. It was good to meet again and think about where God may be leading us. We spent time reflecting on those who had died over that time and the many things they contributed to the life and worship of St. Nicholas' and the community we serve.

We were able to support the parish charities with money raised from the auction after our Harvest Thanksgiving Service and from our Christmas greetings tradition and we were able to enjoy refreshments and fellowship together following our St Nicholas' Day Service.

As always, we offer our thanks to Fr. Richard and all our clergy for the love, care and support they have given us over what has been another challenging year and of course to Bertie for keeping us informed and entertained!

Thank you to each and every one of you for your help, patience and consideration in following the ever-changing Covid rules, for caring for each other, keeping in touch and offering support where needed, both prayerfully and practically.

We have much to be thankful for and look forward to using what we have learnt over this difficult time to further God's Kingdom in our communities, knowing that He is always by our side. *Liz and Fiona*

The St. Nicholas' Mission Prayer

Heavenly Father, strengthen us in our faith

that we may witness as a community to your love in the world;

through Jesus Christ our Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Woosehill Church Report

Woosehill Church continues to be led by Rev Soba Sinnathamby a Methodist Minister and on the 3rd Sunday of each month we welcome a Priest from the Parish. Woosehill church have been meeting regularly this year and the Sunday morning services are being live streamed on YouTube, for those who need to isolate. Though there are reduced numbers attending in person but adding in those watching at home our numbers are not quite as high as before Covid19 but are consistent. We have resumed the Sunday Taize style worship on the first Sunday in the month at 18.15 hrs.

The bible study every continues on Zoom on a Tuesday evening as those attending are not keen to go out at night, we have a good regular attendance from across the parish. The "Together in Prayer meetings are still being held on Zoom on the third Thursday in the month. There are less attending the monthly service at Kennet Court since the pandemic and we are trialling a different start time to see if that helps.

We did re-start the PMC outreach Groups Sing Something Simple, Wool with a Mission, Art and craft groups but attendance is reduced. The church also started a monthly coffee morning (Sip and Share) for those who want to make new friendships or who are lonely. These did not open up as widely as would have been liked so there will be a big re-launch after Easter. Recently some of the groups have been contacted by "The Friendship Alliance" in the borough and now some of our activities are being publicised by them.

The church has been updating its lighting with a new energy efficient system. A Defibrillator has been purchased following a fundraising campaign and is to the left of the front door. There are regular work parties on the first Saturday to improve the appearance of the building and grounds. At present we rarely see any children in church, the decision has been made to concentrate on wooing past members back into church and then in September re-launch our Sunday Club and Messy Church.

There have been some social activities, including a great Quiz hosted on Zoom by Phil and Lynne Paine. The Women of Woosehill (W o W) resumed with some activities on Zoom, but now there is a full calendar for the coming year meeting in person.

Lynn Smith (Woosehill church representative on the PCC)

Changes in the Electoral Roll

The total number of names on the Electoral Roll at 27 March 2022 was 224 as against 216 on 6 June 2021. There were 13 additions during the period: Ruth Gibbs, Lucy Herd, Christine Havercan, Richard Smart, Diane Stone, Tim Stannard, Robert Blake, Lawrence Doyle, Valerie Hester, Esther Lamey, Iulia-Mihaela Pantea, Marius-Stefan Pantea, Max Ansell. There were six deletions during the period: Mick Hattaway, Pam Beckett, Geraldine Lea, Meg Corfe, May Stoneham, Jackie Alexander who have all died.

Teri Austen (Electoral Roll Officer)

Stewardship Report

We continued to see the effects of the Covid pandemic through 2021 with reduced attendances and a continuing challenge for St Paul's and St Nick's finances. However, I'd like to thank St Paul's and St Nick's parishioners who have continued to support the Church financially. Overall giving has remained stable, and we have seen a continued movement away from envelopes to standing orders or direct bank transfers during the year.

We continue to collect via the plate during services or from the wall safe near the font but recognising that many people do not carry cash, we also have a card reader at the back of the Church. Parishioners are also able to donate by text to 70450, texting STPAULS5 or STPAULS10 or STPAULS20 to donate that amount of money with an option to gift aid the donation.

If you are a UK taxpayer, then we can claim Gift Aid equal to the standard rate of income tax on the value of your gift. Gift Aid provides an extremely valuable contribution to the Church's annual income so if you can Gift Aid do please complete a declaration form, available from myself at the email address below. Thank you to those who have completed a Gift Aid declaration form in the past but if your circumstances have changed and you are no longer paying UK tax then please inform me. If you have moved house recently, please could you also complete a new form with your new address. The white envelopes placed in the pews can also be used to gift aid occasional donations.

We also continue to reclaim additional income from HMRC via the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme (GASDS). This allows us to claim tax back on small anonymous cash donations such as the plate collections during services and the wall safe.

Looking forward, we are joining the Parish Giving Scheme from early 2022. We'd like to encourage all existing donors and new members of the church to consider using this scheme. This is run by the diocese who manage the donations and claim Gift Aid where applicable thus reducing the administrative effort for St Pauls & St Nicks. An additional benefit is that donors can index link their donation so that it

retains its value to the Church year on year. Further details and a link to join the scheme can be found on the Parish website.

If anyone has any questions about planned giving, stewardship or Gift Aid then do please contact me at Church or via email at stewardship@spauls.org.uk.

Stuart Fairhead (Stewardship Secretary) stewardship@spauls.org.uk

The Churchyard

This year work in the churchyard has continued to be significantly affected by the COVID19 pandemic and the lockdowns which have limited the number of people permitted to attend the payback sessions and has reduced the number of volunteers.

The probation services has been re-taken under the management of the Government but this has not had any material impact on the visits. Only COVID-19 lockdowns have stopped the visits. The recent reduction in the restrictions has permitted the return of refreshments and a return to a less distanced policy of engagement with the payback attendees.

Andrew Roberts, has repaired the Kubota tractor mower and with a new battery it is proving to be very useful in managing the large grass areas in the churchyard. We have considered selling the tractor mower but it has proven too useful for us to manage without it. This year we removed the broken asbestos roof of the bier shed, in which the tractor is housed, and a new metal roof has been installed proving a dry and secure location for the tractor.

We have decided to stop using bonfires to get rid of the churchyard waste. For a while we struggled with taking waste to the dump by volunteers, but we are grateful to Parish Tree Surgery who have donated their old chipper, which has been installed next to the bier shed. With enthusiastic help from the payback attendees it has been refurbished and is providing excellent wood chip which has reduced the quantity of plant waste around the churchyard and given us lots of woodchip to resurface the paths around the church. It has also enabled us to restart reshaping the Irish yews in an attempt to make them more fastigate – like a column – as was the original intent when they were planted.

The trees we planted as part of the Tree Succession Project are growing nicely. We are pleased Wokingham WI have donated a Medlar tree which has been planted near the Parish rooms and should provide a good show of blossoms and colourful leaves as well as a supply of medlar fruits as it matures.

We are still looking out for Ash Die Back, or Chalara (*hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), but so far it seems to have missed the churchyard trees. If our Ash trees are affected we will need to remove them. It is this threat that we are addressing with the planting of new

trees which will take over when the inevitable happens (over 95% of the Ash trees in the UK, *fraxinus excelsior*, are expected to succumb to the disease eventually).

Two new composting sites have been created under the Cedar tree - alongside the railway fence - and in the far eastern end of the churchyard. The compost and leaf mould heaps are continually being managed and provide good quality compost and leaf mould. We have a good supply which is available for anyone who would like it.

The tree survey which was carried out in 2017, is now being re-run by the churchyard volunteers, to make sure that our trees are kept in good order, pruned and removed, as necessary.

Georgina Spencer who has been responsible for the Biodiversity projects which we have running the the churchyard, has decided to reduce her involvement. We thank her for her support and work on behalf of the churchyard. I am pleased to announce that Laure Porter has agreed to take over the Biodiversity role.

The drains around the church and parish rooms car park still need repairing. This work was planned a couple of years ago but the project was halted by the pandemic. We'd be pleased to hear recommendations of suitable contractors (churchyard@spauls.org.uk) since this is something which we need to revisit to keep the drainage system, around the church, in good working order.

There has been a lot of work done over the past couple of years to remove the old spoil heap on the south side of the churchyard. This has provided a lot of new grave space and we are indebted to one of our volunteers who has spent hours managing this area and maintaining the recent graves.

If you are pleased with the way the churchyard looks and would like to help to maintain it to its current standard, please come and join us. We need people to mow the grass, manage the compost, maintain and document the graves, mend our machines and more. If this is you, please join us any time from 9.00-3.30 on alternate Saturdays, visit the website (<https://spauls.co.uk/churchyard-working-party/>) or email churchyard@spauls.org.uk for more information.

Andy Clark

Community

Mustard Seed

Ongoing restrictions related to the Covid pandemic, of course, dominated our missional work in 2021. Even when restrictions eased somewhat, uncertainty over whether they might be reinstated affected our ability to plan ahead. So, once again it has not been possible to hold a large-scale missional event as had been hoped. Nevertheless, individual church members' care for our community constantly

demonstrates what God's love looks like. In reviewing missional activities over the course of 2020 and 2021, The Mustard Seeds noted that:

- In missional terms, the work of the Kingdom “just happened” but the people doing the work may not have seen what they were doing in missional terms
- Once we were able to hold services/events, a number were very successful:
 - Outdoor Evensong
 - Summer Hymn singing
 - The Mouse Hunt
 - Advent QR code (as best as we can tell)
 - Carol Service in Peach Place (and the location should be retained for the future)
 - Christingle services in schools

In addition, we have seen relationships deepening between ourselves and the rest of the community, notably:

- the response in the community to the arson attack proved that many non-churchgoers see St Paul's as “their Church”
- Better relationships have developed with Nursing homes
- Links with schools have deepened

All of these represent areas of progress and for future work to build upon.

Towards the end of 2021, Mustard Seeds reviewed the charities we support as part of the three year cycle of charitable donations made by the Parish. It was decided to continue with support for USPG (<https://uspg.org.uk/>) and Soulscape (<https://soulscape.org.uk/>). In seeking to identify the third, new, charity to support, we asked the congregations for suggestions. We were sent around a dozen possibilities, all with well argued and passionate reasons for supporting them. This made the choice very difficult. In the end the recommendation made to PCC was to support HomeStart Wokingham District (<https://home-startwd.org.uk/>). HomeStart offers a family support service to disadvantaged and vulnerable families in the Wokingham District, with at least one child under the age of five. The Parish continues to support The Children's Society (<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/>) through donations made at Christingle services.

To promote all the good causes that were presented to us and all those with whom we have worked in recent times, we designed and implemented a Charity Advent calendar where one charity a day was highlighted on Facebook and in services in the run up to Christmas. We hope this gave everybody the opportunity to find at least one organization they could consider supporting individually, as well.

Paul Armitage (Parish Pioneer)

Further reflections on the Pandemic

Jean Vaughan writes:

Although we were all isolated and only going out for exercise we had some wonderful deliveries to St Paul's for giving to various branches of the NHS and Care Service. It all began when a member of our congregation at St Nicks, who's a nurse at Royal Berks, said the staff would like special drinks and snacks to enrich their days. What started as a few carrier bags of goodies became a boot full of food and drink to be distributed among the staff. You responded so generously to the request and there were also lovely notes and pictures from the children at our schools to cheer everyone up. Bags of goodies were also given to the staff at the care homes in our parish, and boxes of snacks and fruit went to Wokingham Hospital. It's wonderful what was achieved at such a difficult time.

Hannah Johnson writes:

It is two years since I treated my first patient with Covid19. I will never forget him, his family or what it heralded. I have treated hundreds since. I find it very difficult to say what it was really like in the first waves, it is so often easier just to say you are fine. There were a number of things that helped. The hope that we had that a vaccine would be found and that the drugs we were trialling would prove beneficial. The support of the community and the way people came together. Whilst the clapping for carers on Thursday evenings was a very special moment it also enabled me to check on our neighbour. One of the most comforting things were the letters of support written, many coming from the Church. We were sent snacks which helped us through the longer shifts. We are in the midst of another wave and the hospital is very busy again but we feel better equipped to know what we are dealing with.

Vanessa Hemmi writes:

Parish Rooms was a bustling community venue with a variety of activity.

Then a lockdown = Closed.

What a task postponing bookings, raising credit notes (avoiding refunds), contacting suppliers plus other adjustments to reduce overheads! So optimistic it'd be all over soon...just a few *more* weeks... but it wasn't.....all the above repeated...while working from home.

After each lockdown the focus was opening safely as much as re-growing business.

What activities were permitted? What were the rules?rules that kept changing....

We received many enquires whilst other halls remained closed. Some booked temporarily.

NHS still took blood, Christmas meals still delivered from the kitchen both years and we became a food bank.

The balance was income vs remaining loyal to our regulars (who are very grateful to us for that)

The pandemic enabled us to shape the diary and procedures: a new website, a live diary, use of door codes - all progress. Additionally there's still the opportunity to occasionally work from home, which is invaluable.

It was a difficult time, challenging, frustrating. Like completely starting from scratch. But I am delighted that the Parish Rooms is once again the lively busy venue as it was before.

If not busier..... 😊

The Wider View

Deanery Synod Report

Much of 2021, inevitably, was overshadowed by Covid and the ongoing crisis we all lived under. We met as a Synod both in person and on Zoom and tried to make as many meetings as possible meetings which were open to anyone who was interested. Reading back through the minutes, I realise exactly how much we achieved in 2021 as a Deanery:

1. We agreed to end the system whereby parishes paid the Deanery a Quinquennial Levy each year and the Deanery then paid for the QI. We reimbursed everyone the money they had paid but not used, and from now on, every parish will pay for its own Inspections.
2. Lynne Paine (Woosehill) became Treasurer and has done an excellent job of working through past years of accounts and is now presenting the accounts to the Standing Committee and Synod on a regular basis with clarity and control.
3. John Sutton (St Paul's, Wokingham) was elected as Lay Chair of the Deanery in July 2021. He is a Primary School Teacher and has made a very bright start, bringing together his ability to listen and his ability to think.
4. Our meetings have dealt with some very big contemporary challenges facing the Church of England and our own churches- our response to the environmental crisis (which has led to the launch of a Deanery Grant for projects which seek to reduce the carbon footprint of a church), engaging with the LLF process (around issues in human sexuality) and also helping the Church to face up to its record on racial discrimination by discussing the powerful report From Lament to Action. We also

had a session on how Churches work in Schools, looking at both a chaplaincy model and also things like assemblies, being a Governor and offering practical support.

5. The Deanery Plan was meant to run from June 2021 to June 2022 but the extended nature of the pandemic means that we need to adjust our expectations as to what we will achieve. We are focusing in on the first two sections as a result of the consultation we had with parishes on what their priorities were- rebuilding relationships and then preparing for the next, longer Plan.

6. In terms of Parish Share, the Deanery paid the lowest percentage of Share in the Archdeaconry but not the lowest in the whole Diocese. We paid 87.5% of what we were asked for- £964, 693 out of £1,102, 617. Winnersh and Bearwood and Owlsmoor are trying to pay in full but not getting there. (Winnersh and Bearwood will not be replacing their last minister with a full-time appointment in part as a result of this). Hurst had a shortfall which was largely linked to issues with the property they own, and Arborfield and Barkham and Sonning choose not to pay in full because of long-running issues they have with the Diocese and/ or the Church of England. Thank you for everything that was paid- it really does help the Deanery and Diocese to emerge well from the pandemic- and let's look to overtake some of the other local Deaneries in 2022.

Fr Richard Lamey

Sweden Report

Obviously, there were no visits in 2021 between Sweden and England but our relationship continues to be strong. We have prayed for each other regularly, and several congregation members have stayed in touch with each other, having stayed in each other's homes. The closest relationships remain between the Clergy who have been in regular contact by email and over Zoom throughout the pandemic. It has been really encouraging and helpful to talk through how things have felt and what restrictions are in place and how things look from distance. Explaining things to someone in a different country has often been a really good way of making sense of them- and even more important is the really strong sense of support and friendship which I love being part of. The icon of St Sigfrid which hangs by the Vestry Door in St Paul's is a daily reminder of the friendship we share, and the common calling we have to bear witness and to serve in our distinct contexts.

"In Mariakyrkan the San Damiano-crucifix we got from St Paul's, Wokingham for our 40th anniversary is an instant reminder of our links of friendship, and our unity in Christ. We also have drawings of St Paul's in both Mariakyrkan and Johanneskyrkan to remind us, which is good, since the pandemic kept us from visiting each other. Although we weren't able to visit, we've found other ways to keep contact and share the experience of how to be Church when we weren't allowed to gather people. This sharing and praying for one another has been

encouraging. Now we face a new crisis. We do worry and pray for the situation in Ukraine. Let us pray for peace in Europe together! The importance of links in Europe and over the borders between our Churches is proving to be vital.”

Fr Richard and Johannes Grimheden