

Wardens' Report for 2021 APCM

One way of looking back to 2020 could be to think of it as a kind of 'stress test' of church life. On a financial level, it put most churches into a period in which what we previously thought of as 'normal' church use of our buildings was either non-existent or severely limited, and trading income (eg from community use of church premises, etc.) was considerably curtailed. We had to see whether our 'business plan' (which is really very much a spiritual plan) made sense under those conditions: we aim to pay from our members' giving for all our activity as a worshipping community, plus whatever we are called upon to contribute to the ministry of our denomination on a wider basis, and on top of that to give away to other Christian work a tenth of everything that is donated to us. At the same time we make our premises available for community use, managing our resources so that in the long run any surplus from that form of trading is used to maintain and improve the facilities.

In the end we finished the year with a modest overall surplus, while our giving to Christian work outside St John's (if you add together the Parish Share contribution and what we gave to other charities) totalled more than ever before in our church's history. This is because sustained giving more than counterbalanced the decrease in hall income, and so we were able to include some important discretionary spending. We believe this was, in God's good grace, because we prioritized giving money away from the outset, and only spent on ourselves what we knew we could afford.

From a comparison of 2020 figures with 2019's, you can see where the main differences were. Please note the following:

- We recovered quarterly Gift Aid from HMRC three times in 2019 but five times in 2020: that was simply a 'catch-up';
- We no longer get any fee income (Category 11) from crematorium funerals conducted by our clergy: the diocese now takes the whole amount;
- The big expenditure under Category 28 was re-surfacing and creating a soakaway in the car park – the major item under Category 27 was work on the vestry roof gutters;
- The overall surplus would have been a small deficit if everything we authorized had been actually completed and paid for inside the year. It was difficult to get contractors to turn up and do things, but almost all those items (including work on the side chapel roof gutters, maintenance work on the church stained glass, and sanding and re-sealing the church porch and hall floors) were completed in early 2021.

Last year we budgeted for a *possible* deficit of £10,000. This year, bearing in mind the items just mentioned hanging over from 2020, our 'reasonable worst case scenario' budget has been made on the basis that we can well afford a deficit of £15,000 if need be, taking us back to a net assets balance similar to the start of 2019 (a year in which we later received 'windfall' extra income of almost £10,000).

There is some important work on our buildings still to be done, both specified in the current church Quinquennial Inspection report and also in our own five-year maintenance plan for the hall (now in its final year). But many of the remaining tasks in the Quinquennial Inspection report and some on the hall can be done by volunteers, so we are hoping that, assuming relaxation of the rules about being able to work together both inside our buildings and in our grounds, we may return to holding 'work days' during the rest of this year, and we would encourage those who have time to spare to ask what jobs they may be able to undertake at times of their own choosing, too.

One disappointment is that our faculty application for removal of the two oak trees behind the toilet block, because of the problems their leaf-shedding gives us, both by gutter blockage and in grounds-keeping, was blocked by the diocesan adviser – apparently on the grounds that our site has no other aesthetically pleasing features than those two trees. We hope to obtain permission to crown-raise and top-reduce the trees instead.

We are grateful once again to all who helped St John's through their voluntary work in the year 2020: handymen, gardeners, lawn mowers, cash counters, sidespeople, flower arrangers, in the book unit, supplying refreshments, and in any other way. You were all so faithful, as much as you possibly could be, and we are really grateful.

Robert and Graham