

APCM 24th MAY 2021 - VICAR'S REMARKS – Summary for Minutes

Catherine thanked the whole St Mary's Family for persevering over the past 18 months and for their patience, their willingness to try new things, for keeping their sense of humour and for the love and care shown to one another.

She reflected on the Pentecost passage from the book of Acts. When we feel uncertain about the future of our churches we should remember the disciples didn't know how they were going to fulfil Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations. They didn't have a plan, finances or manpower. But God had a plan and the resources. Catherine reminded us that *'The Church of God doesn't have a mission in the world. The God of mission has a Church in the world'* and he will equip and empower us, through his Spirit for that mission. It's his mission and his Church. Sometimes we forget that and think it's all down to us, rather than looking, watching, being alert to what God is doing and then joining in.

The Spirit also pushed the disciples out of their comfort zones and they went to people and places they would never have imagined, empowered and equipped by the Spirit.

The pandemic has pushed the Church out of its comfort zone, to reach new people in new ways we wouldn't have imagined. We need to learn from the experience. The Church will have been changed by the pandemic, but through the Holy Spirit the Church is always changing and being pushed out in new and unexpected directions – that is what it means to be church. But through the same Spirit, God has always equipped his Church for every new situation.

What God asks of us is to wait on him – like those first disciples; expectant that God will act, open to the gift of his Spirit and willing to follow where the Spirit leads and guides us – including in unexpected directions.

The future of the Church may be uncertain, but it never has been set in stone. But it is secure in God's hands and if we're waiting prayerfully and expectantly, open to the Spirit and following the Spirit's leading then we can look to the Church's future with anticipation, confidence and hope.

Catherine then set out some of the ways in which St Mary's have been or will be waiting on God and seeking to follow the leading of his Spirit over the coming months:

COVID Review

In February the PCC had spent time reviewing how our church activities had been affected by the pandemic. In particular thinking about:

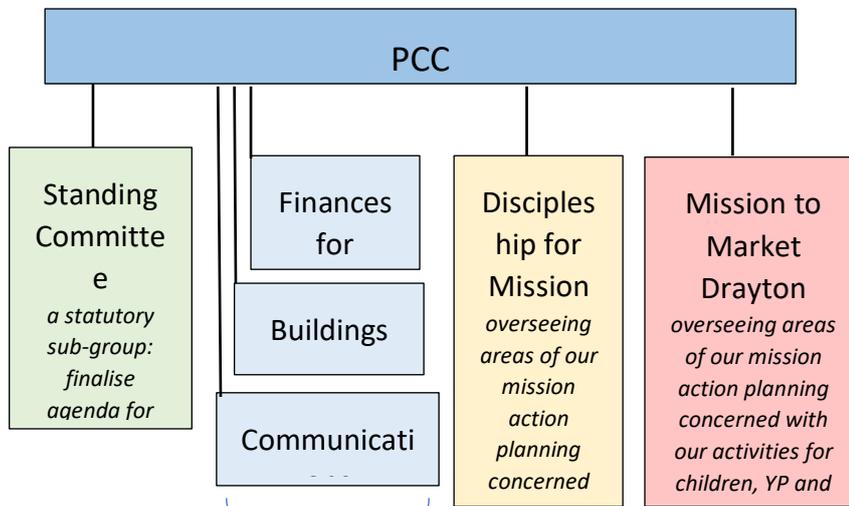
- The things started doing during the pandemic that we think should continue.
- The things started doing during the pandemic that we will stop when we are able to.
- The things that stopped during the pandemic that we definitely want to restart.
- The things that stopped and which – on reflection – we won't re-start.

Some of the many things that were discussed included: continuing to make use of online opportunities; continuing with Phone Friends and Helping Hands; reopening the church during the week and reviewing how we do messy Church and Café Worship.

PCC structures and Mission Action Planning (Away Day)

The PCC plan to meet again in June or July to pray and discern how to whittle down the many mission ideas we've had in their ongoing Mission Action Planning.

Catherine outlined the PCC structure that will be used to support this process.



The above groups comprise our Foundations for Mission

The subgroups will be co-opting members of the wider congregation, so Catherine urged us to think about our skills and interests and where we would like to get involved.

Lead Academy

The Lead Academy Team are: Catherine, Ian and Keren Macfarlane, Lindsay Bashford, Sue Frankfort and Laurina Rushworth.

Catherine explained that we will be continuing to embed our church values and will be rolling out our mission and vision later this year. Our mission (purpose is to *enable people to know Jesus, love Jesus and live for Jesus* and our vision is *to see our town transformed by the love of Christ*.

The team had also completed a module on teams and leadership structures and as a result of that had produced some new induction material for our PCC and the PCC structure above. They will also be working on a pathway for those joining St Mary's that will help people move from welcome, to becoming more involved, to deepening their faith, discovering their gifts and finding ways to serve.

The most recent module was about Mission. As a result, the team are looking into how to provide more support and guidance for our small groups to enable them to be more outward-looking and missional. They are also exploring the idea of ACORN groups. ACORN is a spiritual practice for mission:

Ask – Ask God every day 'Lord, is there some one, today, you want me to connect with outside the church family?'

Call – Trust that God will answer that prayer and call us to talk to someone

Obey – Be obedient in following God's call and contacting or approaching the person and all you have to say is 'How are you?' and be ready to listen.

Report – have a group of people (your ACORN group) who are all doing the same, that you can report back to and share what has been happening in response to your prayer.

Notice God – As a group reflect on what God has been doing in and through the person reporting back.

The Lead Academy team will be trialling this and will report back.

Deanery Youth Church Enabler

Catherine gave an update on the Deanery Youth Church Enabler role. Church Commissioners funding ends this month and fund raising to keep the role going has gone really well (currently at about £16K). We will

try and match fund through grant applications. The role will be on hold until the beginning of next year, while the role description is clarified and a volunteer is found who can work on the grant applications.

Shaping for Mission

Shaping for Mission is the review going on across the whole of Lichfield Diocese, where every Deanery is developing a vision for working together in mission and plans to bring that vision about. Our team is Christine Simpson (Rural Dean), Jane Morris from Christ Church, Elizabeth Perkins from AMICA benefice, Hannah Garside from the Cheswardine United Benefice and Youth Church and Catherine.

Deanery visions will be formulated by the end of Spring 2021. Catherine went through some of the emerging themes for Hodnet Deanery. There is some groundwork needed in terms of a renewing of our own personal faith and discipleship; a renewed engagement with the Deanery and looking for ways to releasing energy for mission, by addressing some of the challenges of finances, administration and looking after buildings.

The emerging vision would likely include wanting to be a united (but not uniform) Deanery, that acts as a hub for sharing ministry and resources, where there is renewed faith and discipleship and where vocations are supported.

Catherine ended with our St Mary's vision prayer.